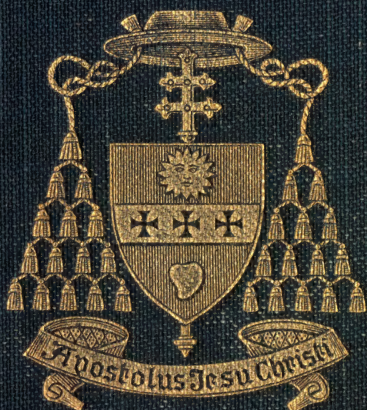


UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



3 1761 01930192 8



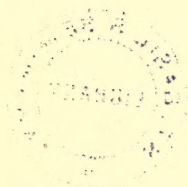




*V. R. ...*



67





# Cardinal Mercier's Conferences



**Nihil Obstat.**

J. CANONICUS MOYES,

CENSOR DEPUTATUS.

**Imprimatur.**

EDM. SURMONT,

VICARIUS GENERALIS.

WESTMONASTERII,

*Die 10 Maii, 1909.*



# CARDINAL MERCIER'S CONFERENCES

DELIVERED TO HIS SEMINARISTS  
AT MECHLIN IN 1907

*Translated from the French by*  
J. M. O'KAVANAGH

*With an Introduction by*  
THE VERY REV. P. A. CANON SHEEHAN, D.D.  
*Author of "My New Curate," "Luke Delmege," &c.*



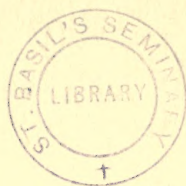
R. & T. WASHBOURNE, LTD.

1, 2 & 4 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON  
MANCHESTER: 74 BRIDGE ST. GLASGOW: 248 BUCHANAN ST.  
BENZIGER BROS.: NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO

1910

*All rights reserved*

NOV - 3 1958







PIO X.

SAPIENTISSIMO PRINCIPI  
CUSTODI FIDEI VIGILANTISSIMO  
CLERI DUCI DILECTISSIMO  
HÆC AD SEMINARIUM CLERICOS  
DE UNIONE ANIMI CUM DEO

ADLOQUIA

VENERABUNDUS DEDICAT  
UTQUE SIBI ET CLERO SUO BENE PRECETUR  
AMANTISSIMUM PATREM EXORAT  
DESIDERATUS JOSEPHUS CARDINALIS MERCIER  
ARCHIEPISCOPUS MECHLINIENSIS.

MCMVIII.

Caro Signor Cardinale,

Quello colla massima compiacenza la dedico  
Nella prefazione, dell'Enciclica vostra Santa ha tenuto  
in Chiesa di Malines, anche per dare, se fosse possibile,  
maggiore autorità ai movimenti d'alle esortazioni;  
Ma: buoni fructi si guarderanno come specialmente  
loro diretta dallo stesso trionfo di Gesù Cristo.

Del Vaticano li 14 Dicembre 1907.

Al'Emo Sig. Card. Brivey  
di Malines.

Prig. P. X



## TRANSLATION.

MOST EMINENT LORD CARDINAL,

It is with the very greatest pleasure that I accept the dedication of the "Conferences" that you have addressed to the Seminarists at Mechlin. In accepting this dedication it is my wish to give, if possible, still more authority to the instructions and exhortations which your book contains, so that henceforth Clerical Students may consider them as the very words of the Vicar of Jesus Christ himself.

From the Vatican, 14 December, 1907.

PIUS X. (Pope).

To the Most Eminent Lord Cardinal, the Archbishop of Mechlin.









## LETTERS OF APPROVAL

---

*From His Eminence Cardinal Logue, Armagh.*

I have received with pleasure and gratitude your translation of "Cardinal Mercier's Conferences." Anything coming from the pen of the learned Cardinal is sure to be solid and edifying. Hence special gratitude is due to you for having brought within reach of the English-speaking readers those admirable addresses, which, though intended for ecclesiastics, will be read with pleasure and spiritual profit by Catholics lay and ecclesiastical.

I wish your translation of this important book every success. I earnestly recommend it to the faithful as a book which they can read with confidence, inspired by the learning and splendid gifts of the author, and by the zeal and piety which have so long marked out His Eminence as a leader in God's Church.

---

*From His Eminence Cardinal Gibbons,  
Baltimore, U.S.A.*

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, and, in reply, to say that I have received the translation of "Cardinal Mercier's Conferences." I have read them with much interest, and most heartily can I recommend them.

*From His Grace Archbishop Bégin, Quebec,  
Canada.*

I congratulate you on the very accurate and at the same time elegant translation you have just completed of "Cardinal Mercier's Conferences." The text reads as if it had been originally written in English.

In praise of the doctrine embodied in these conferences of the scholarly Cardinal to youthful ecclesiastics, it is difficult to add anything to the approbation of His Holiness Pius X., whose motto, *Instaurare omnia in Christo*, the eminent author purposes to realize, and in whose footsteps he tries to follow in these truly practical ascetic instructions.

I wish every success to your timely publication.

---

*From His Grace Archbishop Langevin, O.M.I.,  
St. Boniface, Canada.*

I take great pleasure in recommending the able translation made by J. M. O'Kavanagh of the "Conferences" of the learned Cardinal Mercier to his seminarists at Mechlin in 1907. It was a happy idea to clothe this great book in its present new garb, and thus put within the reach of the English-speaking public a work remarkable for soundness of doctrine, piety of thought, and originality of conception.

*From His Grace Archbishop M'Evay, Toronto,  
Canada.*

Your advanced copy of " Cardinal Mercier's Conferences " to the students at Mechlin is received, and I have much pleasure in recommending the book.

The Holy Father's letter is so strong that it is not easy to add anything more.

---

*From the Right Rev. Dr. Brindle, Bishop of  
Nottingham.*

Many a soul " seeking to please God " out in the world will thank the translator for these wonderful " Conferences of Cardinal Mercier." They were written for his own children, it is true, but their publication must have been a boon to many others in his own land. Now, by means of this translation, their influence will—nay, must—be felt amongst us also ; for the lessons which they inculcate will be found suitable not only for the Levite or the priest, but also for the traveller by the way. The words are the words of a loving Father to the children of his heart, but he does not hesitate to point out the dangers to which they will be exposed on their life-journey ; while at the same time he shows clearly how the dangers may be avoided, and their lives drawn to a closer union with God.

The translation has evidently been well done, for it reads easily and without effort ; indeed, one often forgets that it is a translation at all.



*From the Right Rev. Dr. Drinot y Pierola, Bishop of Huanuco, Peru.*

With much interest and great edification have I read the beautiful book of His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, which you intend to translate into English.

I cannot but congratulate you on your design, and I encourage you to carry out your work, assuring you that you do a work of great religious interest, not only for those persons consecrated to the service of God, but also for all those who aspire to be practical Christians, and who sincerely desire to go to heaven.

Unction, solidity, clearness, and, above all, a very practical spirit, which makes us enter into ourselves and converse with God—these are the characteristics of the conferences which His Eminence Cardinal Mercier has brought out into a book, the title of which reveals so ingeniously the heart of an apostle, a great master, and, above all, a most loving father.

Would to God that the book "*À mes Séminaristes*," written by the zealous Archbishop of Malines, might find translators into all the languages of the Catholic world.

---

*From Rev. Dr. Coffey, Professor, Maynooth College, Ireland.*

You have achieved a great and most valuable work in translating Cardinal Mercier's *Conferences to his Seminarists*. I read them in the original soon after their publication : so far as I am aware, nothing

approaching them in excellence has appeared in recent years. For ecclesiastical students, for priests, and for members of religious communities, they will prove an abiding source of the highest and holiest inspirations. You will have a rich reward for placing them within the reach of those classes all over the English-speaking world.

I have read your translation carefully. I will merely say of it that it is not unworthy of the original. This I consider to be the highest praise I could bestow upon it.

---

*From the Right Rev. Mgr. Parkinson, D.D., Oscott College, Birmingham.*

I read Cardinal Mercier's addresses "À mes Séminaristes" as soon as they were published, and enjoyed them much. They will take an honourable place among the books written expressly for aspirants to the priesthood. They are the warm and thoughtful words of a Superior addressed to a class of young men of whose life, difficulties, and ideals he has had long and intimate experience. I should rejoice if every one of the Seminarists under my charge were to make a close study of them.

You have done a good work in translating the "Conferences" for the benefit of the English-speaking world.





## INTRODUCTION

THIS book is the equivalent in English of a series of conferences addressed by Cardinal Mercier to his Seminarists in the year 1907. The name of the learned and saintly Archbishop of Mechlin is a sufficient passport to the sympathies of clerical readers throughout the world. His Eminence is known all over Europe, but especially in the great intellectual centres on the Continent, as the founder of the Modern Thomistic system of philosophy, called "neoscholasticism," and probably as the ablest protagonist of Catholic teaching, as opposed to the Neo-Kantism and Positivism to which all the erroneous systems of French and German thinkers have now been reduced. But probably he is better known amidst that wide circle of students who came within the happy range of his influence when he was President of the *Collège Léon XIII.* in the University of Louvain, and who have carried with them to far-distant missions grateful reminiscences of the solicitude for their spiritual and intellectual formation, which, even more than his great philosophical reputation, or the six volumes which his untiring energy has poured from the press, seemed to mark his career as President of that College as a new era in the history of his University.

It is always an interesting, but by no means a rare, spectacle in the history of the Church—this descent from high spheres of thought to the levels of ordinary life ; and it is significant that such sudden contrasts and declensions on the part of our intellectual leaders seem always to have for object the elevation of the character of the priesthood through the infusion of new ideas amongst the students or seminarists who are preparing for Holy Orders. It would seem as if, in the solitude of lonely studies, a thought suddenly forced its evidence amidst vast propositions and objections, that perhaps, after all, the formation of a perfect priestly character is of more importance than great systems, which can only exercise the intellects of comparatively few in the great aggregate of humanity. At least, the subject of priestly training seems to have an absorbing interest for the leading minds of the Church ; and hence we have manuals without number, written with care and zeal, and probably productive of much good for personal sanctification and missionary enterprise.

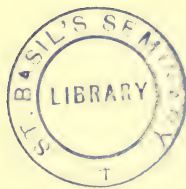
The characteristic of the present work, which seems to differentiate it from similar treatises, is that the author seems to have brought into the various conferences that spirit of close reasoning to which probably his mind was habituated. And, therefore, we have in this treatise not merely pious suggestions and wise and practical hints on the study of the students' sanctification, but a close insight into spiritual work, its nature, its scope, its end, and

its auxiliaries. In dealing with the latter, under the heading "Intercourse with God," the learned author gives quite a novel view on that most perplexing of subjects, Daily Meditation ; and I would venture to say that this chapter throws a new light on the greatest, but most difficult, of spiritual helps, which will probably make the practice of that daily duty much easier and more profitable, not only to students and priests, but also to cloistered religious throughout the world. Nor should I pass over without notice the kindly, yet thoughtful, manner in which sins of the tongue are discussed. Probably there is no greater obstacle to spiritual advancement than the lack of reticence and self-control which is often exhibited in this important matter ; nor a greater help to progress than the spirit of retirement and the love of silence and solitude which are here prudently inculcated. These are but two points among the many excellent suggestions with which the book is filled, and for whose wisdom and special adaptation to priestly wants the name of the distinguished author is a sufficient guarantee. The English translation leaves nothing to be desired. If it has not the brilliancy and *verve* of the original, it is the fault of the language, and not of the translator, who has reproduced the ideas of the author with singular accuracy and felicity.

P. A. SHEEHAN, D.D.

DONERAILE,~

*Vig. Pent.*, 1909.





# CONTENTS

	PAGE
DEDICATION TO HIS HOLINESS PIUS X. - - -	v
AUTOGRAPH LETTER FROM HIS HOLINESS - - -	vi
LETTERS OF APPROVAL - - -	ix
INTRODUCTION - - -	xv
CONTENTS - - -	xix
OPENING WORDS - - -	xxi

## FIRST CONFERENCE

RETIREMENT - - -	3
I. A SOUL CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD SEEKS RETIREMENT FROM THE WORLD - -	3
II. THE SEMINARY SATISFIES THE NEED OF RE- TIREMENT FELT BY SOULS CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD - - -	6

## SECOND CONFERENCE

RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE CONSIDERED FROM THE SPIRITUAL STANDPOINT - - -	14
I. A TRULY CHRISTIAN LIFE IS AN INTERIOR LIFE	16
II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE RE- QUIRES RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE - -	21

## THIRD CONFERENCE

RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE CONSIDERED FROM THE MORAL STANDPOINT - - -	37
I. OF THE DANGERS OF DISSIPATION AND OF THOUGHTLESS WORDS - - -	39
II. THE DISCIPLINE OF THE TONGUE - -	54

## FOURTH CONFERENCE

	PAGE
THE VOICE OF GOD - - - - -	62
I. GOD SPEAKS WITHIN YOU - - - - -	64
II. YOU MUST LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD - - - - -	73

## FIFTH CONFERENCE

INTERCOURSE WITH GOD - - - - -	86
I. PURELY MENTAL MEDITATION - - - - -	92
II. PRAYER A HEART-TO-HEART INTERCOURSE WITH GOD - - - - -	103

## SIXTH CONFERENCE

PEACE OF SOUL - - - - -	130
I. THE REVOLT OF OUR PASSIONS - - - - -	132
II. THE WAR AGAINST OUR PASSIONS - - - - -	142

## SEVENTH CONFERENCE

EMMANUEL : GOD WITH US - - - - -	163
I. DISTRUST OF SELF - - - - -	165
II. ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE IN GOD - - - - -	182
FINAL WORDS - - - - -	204

## OPENING WORDS

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

How often and how earnestly have I longed to come to see you and to speak with you ! When I recall to mind the happy years which Divine Providence at the outset of my priestly career permitted me to spend here at Mechlin in the training of clerical students, and the fourteen years I passed at the Seminary of Leo XIII.—those fourteen happy years of true home-life—I realize how close is the bond between us, so close, indeed, that separation from you has caused me real suffering.

His Holiness has been pleased to raise me to the See of Saint Rombaut ; and I owe him absolute obedience : I am to carry out all his desires ; his spirit, which is the spirit of Jesus Christ, I must make mine ; mine also must be his aspirations, and mine, too, it must be to share generously and unsparingly in his apostolic labours, in common with all whom he deigns to call to his service. Pius X. is known to the whole Catholic world ; this *Holy* Father—the epithet in this case must be underlined, so as to remove conventionality and restore to it its usual and real meaning—this *Holy* Father does not hide his personality behind one that is fictitious ;

he opens his heart to all with childlike candour. You will no doubt remember the first solemn words he addressed to the world : " There will be some, assuredly, who, measuring Divine things by those which are human, will strive to penetrate the purpose of our mind, and wrest it to earthly ends and party interests. In order to cut off this vain hope of theirs, we affirm positively and with all earnestness that, in the midst of human society, we wish to be nothing, and by the help of God we will be nothing but the minister of God whose authority we bear. The cause of God is our cause, and to it we are determined to devote our utmost strength and our very life. Wherefore, if anyone ask the purpose of our mind, we shall at all times give this same answer : ' To re-establish all things in Christ '—*Instaurare omnia in Christo*."<sup>1</sup>

Since everything is to be found in Christ, a Bishop's chief duty and solicitude will be to form on the model of Christ Himself the souls of those who by their state of life will be called upon to form Christ in the souls of others.

Listen to those solemn and encouraging words of the Pope to the Bishops of the Catholic world : " Consider with what care, with what ardour, you must devote yourselves to the sanctification of the clergy ! Before this obligation of your ministry everything else must give way. Give your chief thought to the organization and direction of your Seminaries, so that the teaching given therein may

<sup>1</sup> Eph. i. 10 ; encyclical letter, *E supremi*.



be irreproachable and the lives of the seminarists holy. Let your Seminaries be your dearest delight. Neglect nothing of what the Council of Trent has so wisely established to insure their success."<sup>1</sup>

It is with a feeling of joy, which I hope will be shared by you, my dear friends, that I comply with the desire of our Holy Father. So far as God gives me strength to do so, I shall certainly overcome every obstacle that would deprive me of the pleasure of living in close contact with you. "Before this obligation of [my] ministry everything else must give way."<sup>2</sup>

Your filial love for our Holy Father makes you feel that he has a special affection for you. Need I say that I share with him this affection, and all the more deeply because it filled my heart before it became a special duty. May you so fully realize

<sup>1</sup> Long before he was raised to the Sovereign Pontificate our Holy Father gave proof of his untiring and fatherly care for aspirants to the priesthood. You may judge of this from the following extract from a report sent to Rome on December 1, 1897, by the then Cardinal Sarto, Patriarch of Venice: "I love my Seminary as the apple of my eye. I love it above all else; I look upon it as my home. I am in the habit of visiting it most assiduously, of going there often without giving warning and at times when I am least expected, so as to observe not only the discipline of the house, but also the studies, and even the food. It is my wish, in a word, to watch the progress of my young men, both in piety and in learning; but I do not attach less importance to their health, on which depends, in a great measure, the exercise of their ministry later on" (Cf. Mgr. De Waal, "Le Pape Pie X.," p. 157).

<sup>2</sup> *Huic curae, quæcumque obvenerint negotia cedere necesse est.*

this, that each and every one of you will trust me as a father, giving me his full confidence—a confidence that knows neither reserve nor hesitation ! The future of our diocese depends upon it. Allow yourselves, then, to be formed by us, and by the wise and devoted co-operation of your directors and teachers, so that one day you in turn may mould to holy and Christian lives those who will be entrusted to your care.

Before beginning this series of Conferences, let us recall the words of the Apostle which express my feelings and my hopes, and which ought to inspire yours, for once more I say : My heart is filled for you with all the love of a father for his children ; it is my dearest wish to labour and to suffer that I may infuse into you a new life, and never shall I cease in my endeavours till Christ has found His very home within your heart of hearts : “ My little children, of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in you.”<sup>1</sup>

I solemnly assure you that it was chiefly under the influence of this desire, and of my wish to bind myself publicly to remain faithful to it, that I chose the motto “ APOSTOLUS JESU CHRISTI.”

■ In these Conferences we shall study the question of what a clerical Seminary ought to be for you, considering it from two points of view : first, as a House of Retirement, and, secondly, as a School of Training.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. iv. 19.



## THE SEMINARY A HOUSE OF RETIREMENT

“Meditate upon these things, be wholly in these things:  
that thy profiting may be manifest to all.”—I TIM. iv. 15.





## FIRST CONFERENCE

### RETIREMENT

#### I .

#### A SOUL CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD SEEKS RETIREMENT FROM THE WORLD

*Exi de terra tua et de cognatione tua, et veni in terram quam monstravero tibi.*

“Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.”<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

Go back in memory to the days of your childhood. For many amongst you those tranquil hours when first you heard God's loving call are already far behind you. You may have met upon your path some companion who was frivolous, not to say bad. His conversation displeased you ; the books he read filled you with horror ; his aspirations had nothing in common with yours ; and, guided by some sort of inward warning, you resolutely kept aloof from him. Or, again, when during holiday-

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xii. 1.

time you happened to witness worldly scenes, and saw young people of your own age throw themselves heart and soul into frivolous amusements, your impulse was to shrink from it all with a feeling bordering on disgust. How often have I heard the sigh of future priests or religious, who, after a day spent in dissipating though perhaps innocent pleasures, have come home sad and dispirited, and, like young Gratry on the decisive night of his conversion, have wept silent and bitter tears ! God was gently detaching their hearts from what was not meant for them. He was withdrawing them from the danger of sin, in order to bind them exclusively to Himself.

Dislike for worldly pleasures went hand in hand with an inclination for prayer. The more you withdrew from the world, the nearer you drew to God. You began to see a nobler, a higher object in life ; your thoughts became deeper ; half unconsciously, perhaps, you began to feel that life in the world, however good it might be, however suitable for others, would be for you a void. Your heart was captured, though you knew not yet with how strong a chain, by the mighty attraction of God's love.

At times you may have wondered whether you could make a lifelong sacrifice of those pleasures for which you then felt nought but distaste ; but no sooner had you raised the question in your mind than a voice stronger than nature reassured you, and, with a light and firm step, you resumed your onward march. This time your response to the call of God was positive and deliberate. You said in

your heart of hearts : " I *will* belong to God in a better and more thorough way than the multitude. Among the faithful there are a chosen few : I will be one of them. There is a possibility of doing more for God than what He strictly requires of me. With His grace, which persevering prayer will obtain for me, I will do it. I will give myself over into the hands of my Sovereign Master for time and for eternity. ' The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.'<sup>1</sup> Yea, my beloved Lord, Thou alone wilt be mine inheritance, the object of my desires, of my worship, of my love. Thine alone will be the fruit of all my toil. With childlike trust in Thee, I feel that Thou wilt strengthen my soul, and that what now is only a longing, only a hope, will become through Thee an unchangeable reality. ' It is Thou that wilt restore mine inheritance to me.' "<sup>2</sup>

That, my dear friends, is, in short, the story of your vocation. It may be that all of you have not journeyed by the three stages I have just described—dislike for frivolous pleasures, turning of the heart towards God and piety, deliberate offering up of the soul to God and His service. Many, I believe, go through them one after another with measured step, while for some all is decided by one stroke of Divine grace. Before turning towards God they walk in dangerous paths where more than once their virtue,

<sup>1</sup> *Dominus pars hereditatis meæ et calicis mei* (Ps. xv. 5).

<sup>2</sup> *Tu es qui restitues (stabilies) hereditatem meam mihi* (Ps. xv. 5).

when tried, is found wanting. But a day comes when repentance seizes on their hearts ; they conceive a sudden disgust for what has led them captive ; they recognize the voice of God calling them out of their self-made darkness, and, like Paul on the road to Damascus, they rise again in the full light of grace to become apostles of Christ. Thus God has various ways of acting on the souls He prepares for the service of His altars, but this diversity of method makes no fundamental change in the psychology of a vocation to the priesthood.

## II

### THE SEMINARY SATISFIES THE NEED OF RETIREMENT FELT BY SOULS CALLED TO THE PRIESTHOOD

My dear friends, the creation of the Seminary in order to provide you with the retirement of which your souls have need is a fresh proof of the care God takes of those who are His.

No doubt it is possible for man, wherever he may be, even in bad company, to steel himself against external allurements. There have been angelic souls even amidst the seductions of a court. St. Aloysius Gonzaga saw evil and observed it not. In olden times flowers of heroic virtue bloomed upon the dunghills of decaying Rome. I have known young girls taken against their will to worldly entertainments, and who, in the glamour of excitement that fascinated their companions, kept their virginal hearts close to the God they



loved. But these are exceptions. In general, two facts, established by psychology and history, dictate to the educators of childhood and youth the fundamental laws of their difficult art. The child, who has not been taught by a strong moral education to correct his early inclination, leans, or will lean, towards vice. The *Emile* of Jean Jacques Rousseau is an imaginary type. The young man who has yielded to habits of sin will suffer more or less from their yoke all through life. How many will have the courage to continue to the end the efforts that are necessary in order to conquer? This is why the Church, anxious to have for the service of her altars none but priests who are chaste and strong, expresses through the Council of Trent her wish that all who aspire to the perilous honour of the priesthood should be from their early youth subjected to a severe discipline. "Youths who do not receive a good education," say the Fathers of the Council, "are inclined to worldly pleasures if in their early years they are not trained to piety. If their hearts are not mastered before habits of vice have taken possession of their whole being, there is, as a rule, no hope of their becoming properly subject to ecclesiastical discipline. It is useless to expect that, without an extraordinary and very powerful help from the omnipotence of God, they will perseveringly submit to it."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Quum adolescentium ætas, nisi recte instituitur, prona sit ad mundi voluptates sequendas; et, nisi a teneris annis ad pietatem et religionem informetur, antequam vitiosus*

Consequently, the Holy Council obliges Bishops to establish in connection with their cathedral church a Seminary for the religious training and education of youths whose good dispositions give hope of a vocation to the priesthood.

The Fathers of the Council of Trent, in making this decree, introduced nothing new into the Church. They merely applied to your way of life and to your special wants the Christian idea that has always been the guide of souls anxious to flee from the dangers outside, so as to give themselves more surely and more completely to God. In the very first centuries of Christianity were there not legions of Christians who, disgusted with the sight of pagan debauchery, took refuge in the Thebaïd, in order to devote themselves more surely to prayer and mortification? Was there ever a single founder of a Religious Order who was not convinced that retirement at least, if not enclosure, is an indispensable aid to a life of perfection? Hermits fled from the world to escape from its contamination. *Religious* who shut themselves up in cloisters labour, indirectly of course, for the salvation of the world by their

---

*habitus totos homines possideat, nunquam perfecte ac sine maximo ac singulari propemodum Dei omnipotentis auxilio, in disciplina ecclesiastica perseveret : sancta Synodus statuit, ut singulæ cathedrales ecclesiæ . . . certum puerorum . . . numerum in collegio . . . religiose educare et ecclesiasticis disciplinis instituere teneantur. In hoc vero collegio recipiantur . . . quorum indoles et voluntas spem afferat, eos ecclesiasticis ministeriis perpetuo inservituros (Conc. Trid., Sess. XXIII., c. xviii.).*

privations and prayers. But the secular priest must give himself generously to the world, and yet not be influenced by its spirit ; he must be in continual contact with it, yet must never allow his soul to be sullied by its breath. None more than he needs those deeply-rooted habits of virtue that a lengthy period of vigorous training enables one to acquire. In ages when faith and order reigned in society, and when the secular power itself sanctioned the decisions of ecclesiastical authority, the existence of special institutions for the training of the clergy may not have been so necessary ; and the Church, whose works are also directed, at least on their human side, by the spirit of the times, did not deem the creation of Seminaries indispensable, or even practicable, until the sixteenth century. But Protestantism arose, breaking the old unity between faith and discipline, preparing the way for the French Revolution, and afterwards for a state of society in which ideas of every sort, whether true or false, holy or blasphemous, productions of every sort, whether decent or immoral, institutions of every kind, whether Divine or Satanic, could all with equal liberty vaunt themselves in the broad light of day.

What exceptional dangers for the Faith ! What shoals and sandbanks for morals and discipline ! The difficulty lay not so much in fleeing from such surroundings as in living and working in them during one's whole life without being sullied by them. When a young man constantly hears around him expressions of independence, and even of revolt, how

can he remain humble and submissive ? How can he hear the voice of God speaking to his heart to lead him to that high virtue which his vocation demands ?

The Church has provided the means. You have the happiness of being moulded, formed, and trained in this blessed home, the Seminary. In early times, up to the invention of printing, and even in days much nearer to our own, the existence of each individual was comparatively isolated. It was something akin to that of the peasantry in many lands whose lives are still spent within the circle of their own family connections, or within a very limited area. But Almighty God, foreseeing the intense, feverish hurry that has become so general in our times, and will go on for centuries, has taken care to provide for the Levites of the Church, even in the midst of this perpetual whirl, the quiet and repose that is needed for the life of prayer by which alone the soul can attain to mastery over itself. Sooner or later you yourselves will be thrown into this current, against which you will often have to struggle to save yourselves from drifting. The Seminary was created purposely to teach you *how* to struggle, and to accustom you to the necessary effort.

Now, when you entered this home two years ago, or less, you came to beg for strength in your vocation ; you came to have your souls trained and prepared for the future labours of your priestly lives ; you came to seek a shelter from the seductions of evil, and a retreat where you could learn to study and to imitate all that attracts you in our



Blessed Lord ; you came to seek a discipline that would give strength to your will and incline it more and more to yield itself up entirely to God.

Divine Providence has made it our duty to guide you towards the goal you have before you, and it is not only a duty, but an honour and a joy, to respond to the appeal of your souls and point out to you the paths you have to tread. It must be to you a duty, an honour, and a joy to let yourselves be guided by our direction, and to strengthen by your generous efforts the impulse it will give you.

My dear Seminarists, the education your Superiors are anxious to give you will demand of you many sacrifices. Make those sacrifices unreservedly and in the spirit in which the Church demands them. You will have to give up visits that might be a temptation to you, to deprive yourselves of excursions and pleasure trips that have lost nothing of their old fascination ; you must limit and curtail correspondence that it would be a pleasure to you to keep up as in former days. Light reading, so full of charm notwithstanding its frivolity, must be entirely set aside. You will frequently have to remain alone in your rooms when you are longing to spend an hour in needless conversation ; and even in holiday-time you will have to give up many a gratification, legitimate in itself, that your former companions indulge in without scruple. Do not, I beg of you, look upon these privations as unnecessary and vexatious restrictions, from which you would be glad to escape. Do not liken yourselves to

prisoners, longing to bask again in the bright sun of freedom. Say rather to yourselves : " From my youth have I longed for a retreat where, sheltered from evil and its allurements, I should belong more completely to God, and encounter less danger of losing Him. The kind and fatherly providence of my God has given me the retreat I have sought for ; may He be praised for ever ! *O beata solitudo ! sola beatitudo !*"<sup>1</sup>

How earnestly does not the author of the " Imitation " recommend the love of solitude ! " The cell continually dwelt in groweth sweet. . . . In silence and in quiet the devout soul maketh progress. . . . There she findeth floods of tears wherein each night she may wash and be cleansed, and so become the more familiar with her Creator the further she dwelleth from all the tumult of the world."<sup>2</sup>

I have known young men whom the world flattered in every way : social position, pleasures of all sorts, future prospects—everything seemed in league to take them captive. Still a voice from within called to them, as in olden days to Abraham : " Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee."<sup>3</sup> Faithful to the call of God, they retired into solitude, and once there, God spoke more sweetly than ever to their hearts.

<sup>1</sup> " O blessed solitude ! sole beatitude ! "

<sup>2</sup> " Imitation of Christ," Bk. I., ch. xx., 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Exi de terra tua et de cognatione tua, et veni in terram quam monstravero tibi* (Gen. xii. 2).

When for the first time he finds himself alone in his little whitewashed cell, how many a student falls upon his knees, his very soul flooded with joy; and as he presses his crucifix to his heart the words of the Psalmist rise to his lips: "For better is one day in Thy courts above thousands . . . in the tabernacles of sinners."<sup>1</sup>

It depends upon yourselves, my dear friends, to renew such days for the benefit of your souls. It depends upon yourselves to realize to the full the words of the "Imitation": "The cell continually dwelt in groweth sweet." Love to retire frequently, as frequently as you can, into the solitude of your cell, and there you will taste the interior sweetness of the soul, which, little by little, will detach itself from all and cling to God alone. "Leave vain things to vain people: look thou to those things which God hath commanded thee. Shut thy door upon thee, and call unto thee Jesus, thy beloved. Stay with Him in thy cell; for nowhere else shalt thou find so great peace."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Quia melior est dies una in atriis tuis, super millia* (Ps. lxxxiii. 11).

<sup>2</sup> "Imitation of Christ," Bk. I., ch. xx., 9.

## SECOND CONFERENCE

### RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE CONSIDERED FROM THE SPIRITUAL STANDPOINT

*Tu autem, cum oraveris, intra in cubiculum tuum, et clauso ostio, ora Patrem tuum in abscondito ; et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito, reddet tibi.*

“ But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret : and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.”<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

Twice each day during this octave<sup>2</sup>—at the Office of Matins and in the Epistle of the Mass—the sacred Liturgy puts before us the vision which foretold to the Prophet Isaias the glorious conquests of the Catholic Church :

“ Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem : for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

“ For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people : but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be upon thee.

“ And the Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brightness of thy rising.

“ Lift up thine eyes round about, and see : thy

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Octave of Epiphany.



sons shall come from afar, and thy daughters shall rise up at thy side.

“Then shalt thou see, and abound, and thy heart shall wonder and be enlarged, and the multitude of the sea shall be converted to thee, and strength shall come to thee.

“The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Madian and Ephraim: all they from Saba shall come, bringing gold and frankincense: and showing forth praise to the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, the Church of Christ, placed upon a height, is visible to all: “A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid.”<sup>2</sup> The Messiah appeared upon the scene of history during the brilliant reign of Augustus. He sent His Apostles to the four points of the compass, and three centuries after He had said to them, “Going therefore, teach ye all nations,”<sup>3</sup> the Gospel had indeed spread East and West. Everywhere it had its martyrs; everywhere it had

<sup>1</sup> *Surge illuminare Jerusalem: quia venit lumen tuum et gloria Domini super te orta est. Quia ecce tenebræ operient terram, et caligo populos: super te autem orietur Dominus, et gloria ejus in te videbitur. Et ambulabunt gentes in lumine tuo, et reges in splendore ortus tui. Leva in circuitu oculos tuos, et vide; omnes isti congregati sunt, venerunt tibi; filii tui de longe venient, et filię tuæ de latere surgent. Tunc videbis, et afflues, mirabitur, et dilatabitur cor tuum, quando conversa fuerit ad te multitudo maris, fortitudo gentium venerit tibi. Inundatio camelorum operiet te, dromedarii Madian et Ephraim; omnes de Saba venient, aurum et thus deferentes, et laudem Domino annuntiantes (Is. lx. 1-6).*

<sup>2</sup> *Non potest abscondi civitas supra montem posita (Matt. v. 14).*

<sup>3</sup> *Euntes docete omnes gentes (Matt. xxviii. 19).*



its apologists, its doctors ; its chief Pastor held his See in the very centre of civilization, and the Master of the Roman Empire, having become a disciple of the successor of St. Peter, declared himself at Nicæa the official protector of the first Œcumenical Council.

While contemplating in spirit this truly wonderful development of the Church, my eyes rested on the silent tabernacle, where Jesus remains hidden under the Eucharistic veils, and the contrast between the splendour of the victory and the effacement of the Victor made me better understand that the visible society of which we are members has a *soul* ; that the spirit which animates this society would have it turn its gaze inwards ; that the life of the true Christian is indeed *an interior life*.

## I

### A TRULY CHRISTIAN LIFE IS AN INTERIOR LIFE

Speaking of the glory that the Church would one day achieve, the Psalmist had said that she would draw it from her own interior : " All the glory of the King's daughter is within."<sup>1</sup> The same Isaias who, towards the end of his prophecy, was to announce with enthusiasm the triumphal conquests of Christ, had said of Him that He would reign silently : " Behold My Servant, I will uphold Him : My Elect, My soul delighteth in Him : I have given My Spirit upon Him ; He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

<sup>1</sup> *Omnis gloria ejus filiæ regis ab intus* (Ps. xliv. 14).

He shall not cry, nor have respect to person, neither shall His voice be heard abroad."<sup>1</sup>

And, indeed, is it not in this religious silence that we see the child Jesus grow up at Nazareth? After having spent nine months hidden in His Mother's womb; after having received in silence the adoration of shepherds and the homage of kings in the cave of Bethlehem, He passes the greater part of His life working in a carpenter's shed. His only companions were St. Joseph, whose very name awakens in the mind images of gravity, modesty, and peace, and His Mother, whose chief characteristic, according to St. Luke, was recollection: "And His Mother kept all these words in her heart,"<sup>2</sup> for she loved to ponder them in silence. Have you sufficiently reflected upon this extraordinary, and, to our human conceptions, paradoxical fact of the life of Jesus, hidden in that humble cottage at Nazareth? Weigh it in your minds. . . . There is the Word of God, the resplendent and consubstantial image of the Father, who assumes human nature for the sake of drawing nearer to us, and of scattering amongst men the seeds of truth and grace. All the nations of the earth have to be enlightened and redeemed. According to the Divine plan, the Saviour of the world has no more than three-and-thirty years of human life for the carrying out of this double

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce servus meus, suscipiam eum; electus meus, complacuit sibi in illo anima mea. . . . Non clamabit neque accipiet personam, nec audietur vox ejus foris* (Isa. xlii. 1, 2).

<sup>2</sup> *Et mater ejus conservabat omnia verba hæc in corde suo* (Luke ii. 51).

mission. Now, behold the marvel, the paradox: out of these three-and-thirty years He takes little more than the last three, not quite four, for His public ministry, having lived until then in silence, alone with His Mother and His foster-father, working with His hands, while His soul is in intimate union with His Eternal Father !

If any one thing in this world can make us understand the value of interior solitude, is it not this spectacle, which forms so vivid a contrast to the eagerness and agitation in which many of us spend our lives ? My dear friends, let the lesson sink deep into your minds ; for you it has a special significance. The most important thing, then, in the carrying out of the Divine purpose is neither the noise nor the clamour, neither the rush nor the feverish hurry, not even the good works visible to the eyes of all, but the tranquil and thoughtful preparation of the soul for its work, and the readiness of the will to listen to the Divine whisper, so as to make surer, closer, and stronger our union with Him in whom " we live, and move, and have our being."

Observe how our Divine Lord, even in His public life, still keeps to the habits of the old days at Nazareth. At evening He loves to wander from the throng, and, to repair His strength after the labours of the day, He spends the night in prayer ! " And He passed the whole night in prayer to God."<sup>1</sup> And was not the immediate preparation for His public preaching a retreat of forty days in the desert ?

<sup>1</sup> *Et erat pernoctans in oratione Dei* (Luke vi. 12).

Again, when, after the institution of the Blessed Eucharist, the hour for the dire tragedy strikes, what does Our Saviour do? He withdraws from His Apostles, taking with Him only the chosen three. In their company He crosses the torrent of Cedron; then, eager for a solitude deeper still, He leaves even these, and on His bended knees, alone, but fortified by grace, He begins the supreme and fearful struggle against the recoil of His nature which shrinks from death. A sweat of blood bedews his forehead and trickles down over His face. He receives no comfort except from the angel sent by His Father; but in deep recollection and prayer he finds the superhuman strength that grace always gives, and the courage needed for that act of love which is the most perfect of all: "Father, not My will, but Thine be done."<sup>1</sup> Jesus in the Garden of Olives—Jesus forsaken by men, forsaken, apparently, even by His Father, while He raises towards Him this cry of hope against hope: "My God, My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?"<sup>2</sup>—Jesus lying in the grave for three days—Jesus ever since, and till the end of time, making His abode beneath the Eucharistic veils of bread and wine, allowing Himself to be laid in a ciborium, to be enclosed in a tabernacle, yet living ever in direct communication with His Father, "to make intercession for us"<sup>3</sup>—

<sup>1</sup> *Non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat!* (Luke xxii. 42).

<sup>2</sup> *Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?* (Matt. xxvii. 46).

<sup>3</sup> *Semper vivens ad interpellandum pro nobis* (Heb. vii. 25).





such, my dear friends, is Jesus Christ, the model that Christians have to copy, especially we whose mission it is to teach the world to know Him and to love Him.

What wonder, then, with this example before them, that those souls who have been most faithful to our Blessed Lord should always have hungered after solitude and silence? I reminded you in our first Conference of those multitudes of men and women, many of them belonging to the highest families of Rome, who fled in haste to the lonely huts of the Thebaïd. In like manner Benedict buried himself in the cave of Subiaco to think out those rules that were to form the code of monastic life throughout the Western Church, as likewise, twelve centuries later, St. Ignatius of Loyola shut himself up at Manresa to elaborate those wonderful "Spiritual Exercises" that were to form and discipline the strong legions of the Society of Jesus.

All Religious Orders have attached great importance to the rule of silence. Some, like the Hermits, and even in our day the Trappists, have bound themselves to absolute and perpetual silence; others—and these in greater numbers—have combined the practice of silence with the duties of social life, whether within their community or by intermittent intercourse with the exterior world; but all have understood the necessity of surrounding the soul with an atmosphere of silence and recollection that would help it in its interior efforts towards



its ideal of perfection, and keep it in permanent contact with God.

Nay, more ; is it not our Blessed Saviour Himself who has told us that in order to pray well it is absolutely necessary to seek solitude and silence ? “ But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret : and thy Father, who seeth in secret, will repay thee.”<sup>1</sup>

In His familiar conversation with the sisters of Lazarus He placed before us two ideals of life : the one correct, irreproachable—that of Martha ; the other better, the one He preferred—that of Mary. Martha is active ; she has many exterior occupations, and does not well comprehend how a soul can sit in silence at the feet of Jesus listening to His words. Mary thinks of one thing only ; she lives upon prayer. The Divine Solomon does not condemn the former, but His heart goes out to the latter : “ Mary hath chosen the best part, and it shall not be taken from her.”<sup>2</sup>

## II

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE REQUIRES RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE

How are we to account, my dear friends, for this need of silence in the life of a true Christian ? How is it that the most saintly souls retire more and more

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Maria optimam partem elegit, quæ non auferetur ab ea* (Luke x. 42).

willingly into its depths—to such an extent, indeed, that their progress towards perfection is calculated precisely by the distance they have penetrated into that interior life which, in its highest development, is called the *secret* or *mystic* life? The Christian religion is thus defined by our Blessed Lord Himself in His last discourse to His Apostles: He calls it the knowledge of “the only true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent.”<sup>1</sup>

TO KNOW GOD !

TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST !

The whole sum of man's intercourse with God constitutes *religion*. The whole sum of the Christian's intercourse with Jesus Christ constitutes the Christian's religion.

Now, the next point of my argument is this: The knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ demands re-collection and silence.

Therefore the fundamental reason for the law of silence which plays so important a part in the rules of a seminary is its *religious* value.

You must understand this reason in order to appreciate fully the grandeur of your life, and in order to guard yourselves against any tendency to lower the holy rule of Ecclesiastical Seminaries to the level of the disciplinary rules of barrack-life or of ordinary police or municipal regulations.

TO KNOW GOD ! THE ONE TRUE GOD !

“Who is like unto God?” Who is great, power-

<sup>1</sup> *Hæc est vita æterna ut cognoscant te verum Deum et quem misisti Jesum Christum* (John xvii. 3).

ful, just, wise, like unto Him? "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and weighed the heavens with His palm? Who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who hath forwarded the spirit of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor, and hath taught Him? With whom hath He consulted, and who hath instructed Him, and taught Him the paths of justice and knowledge, and showed Him the ways of understanding? Behold, the Gentiles are as a drop out of a bucket, and are counted as the smallest grain of a balance: behold, the islands are as a little dust. . . . All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing, and vanity. To whom, then, have you likened God? or what image will you make for Him?"<sup>1</sup>

Every human soul has an invincible need of God. Ethnography knows no nation of atheists. Those who in our day, under the name of Positivists and Agnostics, systematically endeavour to banish God from the human conscience, only succeed in changing His name. They call Him the Divine or the Ideal, but they cannot deny His existence.

How could they deny Him? "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these things: who bringeth out their host by number and calleth

<sup>1</sup> *Omnes gentes quasi non sint, sic sunt coram eo, et quasi nihilum et inane reputatæ sunt ei. Cui ergo similem fecistis Deum? aut quam imaginem ponetis ei? (Isa. xl. 12-18).*

them all by their names : by the greatness of His might, and strength, and power, not one of them was missing."<sup>1</sup>

The pagans were guilty, says St. Paul in writing to the Romans, not because they were ignorant of God, but because, while they could not be ignorant of His existence, they did not inquire into His nature, and did not regulate their lives according to His sovereign laws. In their folly, they substituted idols for the true God ; they adored and served the creature instead of the Creator. God imposes upon all men one supreme duty—that of seeking Him, their Creator.

To the agnostics of all ages—to those of Athens who raised an altar to “ the Unknown God,” to our contemporaries who proudly robe themselves in the mantle of science the better to disdain Him—He opposes the spectacle of the visible universe and the laws of history. He it was who “ loved us first.” He it is, too, who puts us in the happy impossibility of living in total ignorance of Him. But, having stooped to make the first step towards us, He invites us to come forward in our turn, and advance of our own free-will towards Him. In His fatherly affection, He wishes to leave us the joy of being able to attribute to ourselves, in a certain measure, the acquisition of our eternal happiness. He shows us that wisdom and gratitude require that we should be faithful to Him, but He leaves us free to misuse His benefits and to ignore His love.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 26.



You may have often towards the close of day witnessed the touching scene of a workman taking his hard-earned rest in his little cottage garden ; on the doorstep his wife bends over a little child, helping it in its first feeble efforts to walk. The father, keeping at a short distance, stoops down almost to the level of the little one, and encourages it with voice and gesture to come towards him. He longs to take the child into his arms and press it to his heart, but he refrains from doing so ; he waits patiently, coaxing it, urging it to make the attempt to come to him. The child draws near to the father, and falls into the strong arms outstretched to receive it. Such is the dealing of the earthly father with his child ; such also is our Heavenly Father's way with us. He gave us first, and with prodigality, the proofs of His power, His wisdom, and His love. " God, who made the world and all things therein, He being Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands ; neither is He served with men's hands as though He needed anything, seeing it is He who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things ; and hath made of one, all mankind, to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times, and the limits of their habitation. That they should seek God, if haply they may feel after Him or find Him, although He be not far from every one of us ; for in Him we live and move and are ; as some also of your own poets said : ' For we are also His offspring.' "<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 24-28.



Each created perfection is like the rung of a ladder that enables humble and upright souls to rise towards God, but not one of them makes Him known to us as He is. The development of our knowledge of the Infinite requires from us a sustained effort of thought. St. Thomas Aquinas concludes his philosophical and theological study of God by saying that the highest knowledge of the Divine Being that man can naturally attain to is the well-pondered conviction that the Infinite is essentially beyond the comprehension of any finite intellect. And do not ask : " Why does God hide Himself ? " He does not hide Himself ; He is by His very nature essentially hidden from our human comprehension. Why does God hide Himself ? One might as well ask why a reasoning being can get to know the invisible only by reasoning, or, which comes to the same thing, why man is not God.

Now, if the knowledge of God can be reached only by our own efforts, do you not see at once how much the religious soul that yearns for God needs silence ? If some unwelcome visitor knocks at your door while you are intently thinking out some problem of art or metaphysics, will it not require an effort to repress a movement of impatience ? That great psychologist certainly understood this, when, having fathomed the emptiness of all pleasures, he had the courage to ask : " Why then do we delay forsaking the hopes of this world, to give ourselves up wholly to seek after God and true beatitude ? " <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, " Confessions," Bk. VI., ch. xi.

One evening at Ostia, far from the noisy throng, Augustine and his mother stood alone at an open window, lost in contemplation of the sea's immensity. They had already trodden under foot all pleasures of sense; their souls were soaring up beyond the beauties of nature, higher and higher, towards Him who had made them; their minds were turned away from all earthly scenes, from all passing things, and their souls were wrapt in silence. "And we entered into our own minds, and passed them by, mounting still higher up, that so we might reach that country of never-failing plenty where Thou feedest Israel for ever with the food of truth, and where the life is that Wisdom by which all these things are made, and all things that have been, and all that shall be. But Itself is not made, but so is, as It was, and so always will be: or rather *was* and *will be* agree not with It, but only *is*, because It is eternal, for to have been heretofore, or hereafter to be, is not eternal."

<sup>1</sup>

Do you desire, like St. Augustine, to seek God and to find Him? Like him, then, wrap yourselves up in silence, and turn to your Father, who reads your inmost souls, and your Father will reward the effort. "But thou when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."

<sup>2</sup>

Silence, then, is necessary for those who seek God; it is necessary for those who seek Jesus Christ. In

<sup>1</sup> "Confessions," Bk. IX., ch. x.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. vi. 6.

his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle St. Paul addresses to God this sublime prayer : " I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His spirit with might unto the inward man. That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts : that being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth [of the works of Christ] : to know also the charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God."<sup>1</sup>

In its extent—that is, considering its duration—the work of redemption began at the beginning of time, and will last for ever ; in its compass it embraces both angels and men ; it goes down into the depths of our weak nature, and brings us up from the mire of sin, to carry us to the sublime heights of Divine sonship. And at the cost of what humiliations does the God-Man accomplish this task ! Let us cast an eye along the road by which He came to

<sup>1</sup> *Flecto genua mea ad Patrem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, ex quo omnis paternitas in cœlis, et in terra nominatur, ut det vobis secundum divitias gloriæ suæ virtute corroborari per Spiritum ejus in interiorem hominem, Christum habitare per fidem in cordibus vestris : in caritate radicati, et fundati, ut possitis comprehendere cum omnibus sanctis, quæ sit latitudo, et longitudo et sublimitas et profundum : scire etiam supereminentem scientiæ caritatem Christi, ut impleamini in omnem plenitudinem Dei (Eph. iii. 14-19).*

us : He, the Consubstantial Word of the Father, the splendour of His eternal glory, assumes our wretched nature, with all its infirmities, sin excepted. Human nature, indeed, has its beauty ; compared with the brute, man has all the majesty of a king ; but considered from the heights of Divinity, what a worthless thing it must be ! The Word will not assume it without undergoing what St. Paul thinks fit to call an annihilation : “ Who being in the form of God, . . . emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men and in habit found as a man.”<sup>1</sup> Still more, He consents to this degradation only to pass through the very depths of opprobrium and suffering. Once man, of His own free-will He constitutes Himself a prisoner in our stead, responsible for all our crimes. To expiate our pride and our sensuality He allows Himself to be brought to such a state that “ there was no beauty in Him nor comeliness . . . no sightliness that we should be desirous of Him : despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity ”<sup>2</sup>—“ a worm and no man ; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people.”<sup>3</sup> He sinks into the abyss of voluntary humiliations, until He is seen by the crowd as one condemned to the death of the cross ! “ He humbled

<sup>1</sup> *Qui quum in forma Dei esset . . . semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens, in similitudinem hominum factus et habitu inventus ut homo* (Phil. ii. 6, 7).

<sup>2</sup> Isa. liii. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ego sum vermis et non homo* (Ps. xxi. 7).



Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross."<sup>1</sup>

Will this be all? Ah, no! A day's public humiliation, even with the foreknowledge of its lasting throughout all time, does not satisfy this sublime soul that measures to its very depth the nothingness of the creature, and the inalienable rights of Divine Justice over guilty man. Behold! to the very end of time, all generations shall witness this marvel, which certainly is the highest expression of Omnipotence in the service of Love: that a God should hide His majesty under the garb of human nature and His humanity under the appearance of a food that even the lowest of us can partake of, in order to perfect the union of his soul with his Creator!

*"O res mirabilis, manducat Dominum pauper, servus et humilis."*

My dear friends, you are aware how difficult it is to rise to the comprehension of a work of genius—the "Divine Comedy" of Dante, for instance; the "Office of the Blessed Sacrament" by St. Thomas Aquinas; a masterpiece of Rembrandt, Velasquez, or Murillo; a musical drama, such as the "Passion" by Bach; or one of those poems in stone—those old cathedrals of ours. Were your mind to grasp one of these masterpieces, you would understand under one of its aspects the genius that produced it, but the personality of the artist would still remain unknown to you.

<sup>1</sup> *Humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis* (Phil. ii. 8).



What, then, can we say of the personality of the God-Man? Pope St. Leo says it infinitely surpasses anything that human words can depict. Whether it be a question of the Divine or of the Human Nature of Christ, we can but reiterate the Prophet's cry: "Who shall declare His generation?"<sup>1</sup>

Eternity will be ours to fathom the abyss of the Divine perfections, and to explore the mystery of the Incarnation. Never, even with the help that the light of glory will give to our intellects—never shall we be able to say that we have succeeded. We shall one day see with our own eyes that very Jesus who has so loved us, and who, to obtain from us a return of love, has spared Himself no depth of suffering. We shall contemplate the work of Redemption as a whole, and shall see it fully vindicated from the reproaches that, in their pride, impious men cast upon it now—"that Thou mayest be justified in Thy words, and mayest overcome when Thou art judged";<sup>2</sup> but never shall we understand the excess of love with which the Heart of Jesus burns for us. How vast a subject for meditation! What an abyss is here open for loving hearts to fathom! How deep

<sup>1</sup> *Excedit quidem multumque supereminet humani eloquii facultatem divini operis magnitudo: et inde oritur difficultas fandi, unde adest ratio non tacendi. Quia in Christo Jesu Filio Dei non solum ad divinam essentiam, sed etiam ad humanam spectat naturam quod dictum est per Prophetam: Generationem ejus quis enarrabit? . . . Et ideo nunquam materia deficit laudis, quia nunquam sufficit copia laudatoris (Sermo IX., "De Nativitate Domini").*

<sup>2</sup> *Ut justificeris in sermonibus tuis et vincas cum judicaris (Ps. l. 6).*

a joy it is for a thoughtful soul to feel herself hopelessly vanquished in her efforts to measure the merciful love that overwhelms her !

Man, in his pursuit of the Infinite, grows in knowledge only in proportion as he comprehends the distance that separates him from the Ideal which he pursues.

No one has expressed this feeling better than the great Pope St. Leo. These are his words : " Let us, then, rejoice at our inability to speak adequately of this great mystery of mercy ; and, seeing that we cannot say to what heights our redemption has raised us, let us feel it to be good for us thus to be overcome. For none comes nearer to the knowledge of the truth than he who understands that, though he has made much progress in Divine things, there always remains matter for his further study. Yea ! he who presumes that he has reached his goal, finds not that for which he sought, but fails in his search for it.<sup>1</sup>

There are three ways of assimilating the Christian doctrine. A child can learn it mechanically before he reaches the age of reason ; a man, devoid of charity, unbelieving, and even impious, can study

<sup>1</sup> *Gaudeamus igitur, quod ad eloquendum tantæ misericordiæ sacramentum impares sumus : et cum salutis nostræ altitudinem promere non valeamus, sentiamus nobis bonum esse, quod vincimur. Nemo enim ad cognitionem veritatis magis propinquat, quam qui intelligit, in rebus divinis, etiam si multum proficiat, semper sibi superesse quod quærat. Nam qui se ad id, in quod tendit, pervenisse præsumit, non quæsitâ reperit, sed in inquisitione deficit* (S. Leo, Sermon IX., " De Nativitate Domini ").

it from motives more or less evil, and can grasp something of its meaning; but the faithful study it in order to understand it, so that thereby they may increase their love for God. "Vain," says Bossuet, "is the knowledge that does not turn to love." "Know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God."<sup>1</sup> The more you feel that the love of Christ for you is beyond the measure of your knowledge, the more easily will you abandon your whole soul to the Divine will.

Eph. iii. 19.

"Tibi se cor meum totum subjicit,  
Quia Te contemplans totum deficit."<sup>2</sup>

Let us look around us. Religious indifference prevails wherever the multitudes, seeking after pleasure, or carried away in the whirlwind of business, do not stop to reflect. The life of the soul continues intense only within the walls of the cloister or the Seminary—those quiet homes where silence, so helpful to our union with God, can be perfectly enjoyed. Have you not heard these words of wisdom: "He will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him, and he will pray in the sight of the Most High"<sup>3</sup>

Apostles of the inner life, as you will one day be, establish yourselves, I beg of you, and keep yourselves in the requisite condition for the development of your own inner life. Withdraw willingly into

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> "Adoro te Devote."

<sup>3</sup> *Justus cor suum tradet diluculo ad Dominum qui fecit illum et in conspectu altissimi deprecabitur* (Ecclus. xxxix. 6).

solitude, and there learn to love silence. I shall not speak to you to-day of the value of silence as a safeguard for modesty, discretion, and charity ; we shall consider it from that point of view on another occasion. I ask you now to practise it and love it for the sake of your own private intercourse with God. "When we keep silence with men," says St. Bernard, "we speak all the better with God." So do not complain when the obligation of keeping silence during certain hours of the day is imposed upon you ; observe it faithfully, even when no one is there to exact it. If you fail in this, it will be evident that you have bound yourselves in a servile spirit to a rule of which you have not taken in the meaning. Whenever you can do so, close the door of your cell behind you, and there "in secret" turn in spirit to Him who is the companion of your solitude ; "having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret," and let no shadow of doubt cross your minds as to the fulness of your reward, for "thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."<sup>1</sup>

My dear friends, you often hear it said that man has need of some diversion. Nothing can be truer. The physical life of our organs, and, as a consequence, the activity of our moral being, are subject to the law of repose, and the health of the whole organism to the equilibrium of the functions of the different organs which constitute it. After a period of action nature requires a period of reparation, of rest. The overuse of the organs disturbs the system

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 6.



and becomes a cause of disorganization. The great contemplatives knew this well in the early Religious Orders of Western Europe, and still in our days amongst the Carthusians and Camaldolese manual labour holds a place of honour in the monastic rule : it rests the brain, and thus gives it new vigour to resume its work.

The statesman whom the English loved to call the "Grand Old Man" turned with relief, after the strain of his Parliamentary duties, to his favourite recreation of felling trees. Like Gladstone, Mr. Roosevelt, President of the United States, proves to his fellow-citizens, both by word and example, how useful physical exercise is as a relaxation from intellectual labour. Throw yourselves *heart and soul* into the recreations and outdoor exercises which your Seminary provides and organizes for your benefit. In these your souls are safe, and they will be the means of helping instead of hindering the higher efforts of your interior life. All melancholy must be banished from Christian society. Were not the angels sent by God to tell the world that the advent of Christ was the coming of joy? "For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy."<sup>1</sup>

But the practice of recollection will make you understand that it is not in noisy diversion that the purest pleasures, the serenest joys, are to be found ; their source is within the soul. "Thus saith the Beloved : I am thy salvation, thy peace and thy

<sup>1</sup> *Ecce ego evangelizo vobis gaudium magnum* (Luke ii. 10).



life. Keep thyself with Me, and thou shalt find peace. Let go all transitory things : seek the eternal. What are all things temporal but seductive snares ? and what avail all created things if thou be forsaken by the Creator ? Cast off, then, all earthly things, and make thyself pleasing to thy Creator, and faithful to Him, that so thou mayest lay hold on true happiness.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us yield ourselves up to that holy longing of the Psalmist, whose words may be regarded as a true expression of what pious souls experience in their interior lives. “ O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at the break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted ; for Thee my flesh, O how many ways ! . . . In a desert land, and where there is no way and no water, so in the sanctuary have I come before Thee to see Thy power and Thy glory. . . . If I have remembered Thee upon my bed, I will meditate upon Thee in the morning, because Thou hast been my helper, and I will rejoice under the cover of Thy wings. My soul hath stuck close to Thee ; Thy right hand hath received me.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “ Imitation of Christ,” Bk. III., ch. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Deus, Deus meus, ad te de luce vigilo. Sitivit in te anima mea, quam multipliciter tibi caro mea. In terra deserta, et invia, et inaquosa. Sic in sancto apparui tibi, ut viderem virtutem tuam et gloriam tuam. . . . Si memor fui tui super stratum meum, in matutinis meditabor in te, quia fuisti adjutor meus. Et in velamento alarum tuarum exultabo, adhæsit anima mea post te, me suscepit dextera tua* (Ps. lxii. 1, 9).

### THIRD CONFERENCE

#### RECOLLECTION AND SILENCE CONSIDERED FROM THE MORAL STANDPOINT

*Custodi quantum potes interiorem hominem tuum . . .  
Si vis bene custodire, tace prius et audi et non delinquas in  
lingua.*

“Protect as well as you can your interior life. . . . If you wish it to be well guarded learn first to be silent, to listen, and not to sin by the tongue.”<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

We hope you have now grasped the necessity of silence for the freedom of the soul's flight towards God and towards His Christ. Our object was to make you understand that the retirement in which you are spending these years must be a special preparation for your future ministry. What, in truth, is the normal life of a baptized soul if not a progress in the knowledge and love of the true God and of Jesus Christ, who, being “the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” can alone lead us surely to the goal, can alone keep our intellect at rest in the certainty of our Faith, can alone maintain and renew our zeal for love and for action?

If one who embraces the Apostolic life has not

<sup>1</sup> St. Bernard.

learnt in the silence of his soul to capture those rays from the Divine source that enlighten all men at their entrance into this world ; if he has not learnt to seek warmth for his heart in the Heart of the Incarnate God, the overflowing fountain of grace and truth, how, think you, will he teach others to do so ? . . . My dear friends, let me ask you what comfort will you give to sinners, to the sick, to those who are in sorrow, if you do not yourselves possess the secret that inspires words of forgiveness and of healing—words that give courage to the fallen to rise and follow Christ ? How will you help in their upward flight those ardent souls whose love soars higher than the fulfilment of precept, if you do not, by an assiduous contemplation of the Divine Perfections, hunger and thirst after the Infinite Good and after the spiritual progress of your own souls ?

Would you be hypocrites ? God forbid ! But, to preach the Faith with efficacy you must have it ; to bring others to love God before all else, you must be convinced that your own love for Him will never be full and perfect. Therefore, under pain of total or partial failure in your vocation, you must consider it your bounden duty to profit to the uttermost by the years of retreat the Church provides for you in this home of prayer and study, to the end that you may accumulate within you a rich store of Apostolic ardour, and so carry, later on, into your long-desired field of labour, a burning zeal for the salvation of souls.

It is our earnest hope that our first two Confer-

ences will develop in your souls that spirit of piety and of apostleship with which every minister of the altar ought to be inflamed.

To-day we intend to complete this subject by considering the practice of recollection and silence from a special point of view—that of your *moral education and training*.

We shall point out to you first of all *the dangers of dissipation and of thoughtless words*; secondly, we shall speak to you of the *discipline of the tongue*.

### I

#### OF THE DANGERS OF DISSIPATION AND OF THOUGHTLESS WORDS

St. John, in his First Epistle, attributes to three causes the disorders that prevail in the world: the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life. “Love not the world nor the things which are in the world, . . . for all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.”<sup>1</sup>

Every one of us is troubled—some more, some less—by these three inclinations. The efforts of virtue have for their object to keep these inclinations within the bounds assigned to them by duty. The virtuous man strives during his whole life; he can never rest upon his laurels and say to his soul

<sup>1</sup> *Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt. . . . Quoniam omne quod est in mundo, concupiscentia carnis est, et concupiscentia oculorum et superbia vitæ* (1 John ii. 15, 16).





---

## Cardinal Mercier's Conferences

---

that the fight is ended. Nevertheless, with the help of God's grace, virtue can triumph over the most rebellious natures ; the sensual become chaste, the selfish generous, and souls full of pride bow down their necks to the yoke of humility. It is Christian education that brings about these wonderful transformations.

But to achieve them two things are absolutely indispensable : Watchfulness on the part of him who engages in the struggle, and the deliberate use of his strength of will.

Bishop Dupanloup, one of the great masters of education, unhesitatingly declares that levity is the most hopeless defect that can disfigure a character. "All other defects," he says, "can be attacked boldly and openly, and can be conquered by dint of perseverance. Pride can be humbled and transformed ; it can even become an element of virtue. Laziness, too, can be overcome. But what is to be done with the light, frivolous, fugitive soul ? How is it to be taken captive ? How, indeed ! That is why levity is so much to be feared. When allowed to develop and pervade the whole character, it is an obstacle to the work of education, it prevents response to the most assiduous care, and frustrates all your efforts."

Now, levity of character is the inevitable result of dissipation, just as gravity is the result of reflection. Man is so constituted that, left to himself, he goes directly towards the external. During the early years of his childhood his whole being throws itself



outwards. External objects excite his perception and awaken in him impressions some of which are agreeable, some painful. He instinctively abandons himself to the former, and shrinks from the latter. His behaviour is entirely governed by the various feelings to which his nature subjects him. Woman is by nature very like to a child. Generally speaking, she yields readily to the sympathies and the antipathies which imagination, the reservoir and accumulator of impressions, awakens in her heart ; and in many cases it is not easy to make her listen to reason. This disposition, it may be said in passing, is very probably the primary cause of her subordination to her husband. Man, in fact, submits more easily to the guidance of reason. His *virility*, in the moral sense of the word, consists in the dominion which his will, enlightened by reason, wields over his imagination, and, consequently, over the impressions produced by his senses. The first human act—that is, the first which man is capable of accomplishing at the “age of reason”—is performed the moment when his soul enters into possession of itself and becomes master of its own acts. This is the special moment when volition triumphs over the selfish solicitations of the inferior faculties, when it yields to the guidance of reason rather than to the promptings of sense or sentiment—in a word, when the will itself regulates its own behaviour.)

Thenceforward the struggle begins between the sensitive faculties and the governing power of free-will. According as the latter triumphs or is de-

feated, we go either up or down in the scale of morality, virtue, and character. There are men who seem incapable of tearing themselves away from the fascination of exterior attractions ; whatever glitters or excites, ensnares them ; they have no self-control ; they follow the lead of the first comer, and are regarded by sensible people merely as grown-up children.

Others are habitually under the control of their feelings : they give way to every emotion. Characterless beings, devoid of all virility, they are disdainfully looked upon as being considerably weaker than womankind.

My dear friends, do you want to be *men* ? Do you want to bear the hallmark of virility, and to wield over others the influence that virility alone can give ? If so, be masters of your senses, of your imagination, of your feelings ; take firm hold of your lower faculties ; govern them with authority ; gather them together if they are dissipated. They are yours—they belong to you. Bridle them, and remain their master, for on this condition only will you be *men*.

Is it not clear, then, that you must have a watchful eye on the motives that urge you to act—that you must weigh these motives in the scale of *common sense*, and not deliberately follow their dictates till you have seen their right to guide your conduct ? None but actions which are performed with *free-will* are morally good or meritorious. But the freedom of an action depends on a twofold reflection : the one must give you an assurance that what you wish

for is, considered in itself, morally capable of serving your purpose ; the other will determine for you the attitude of your own mind as to the action, in so far as it concerns your last end.

Let us draw the conclusion, my dear friends, that we become men only in proportion to our striving after a habit of reflection. And as grace never takes the place of nature, but engrafts itself thereon, and uses it for its own ends, so your spiritual perfection, and, consequently, your priestly education, go hand-in-hand with your power of reflection. Now, a dissipated mind reveals itself by thoughtless words. It never dreams of weighing the *value*, the *consequence*, or the *suitableness* of its words. For such a one language becomes a mere reflex that outward excitement sets going, with no other guide than the emotions ; it gushes from sensitiveness rather than from obedience to the dictates of a self-possessed will, a will that knows what it wants and wants what it knows to be right.

Children chatter unceasingly. The talk and gossip of women, at no matter what age, have always been an inexhaustible subject for comedy and for the *vaudeville*. Man is supposed to have more discretion and more moderation of language, because he is generally considered to have more command over his emotions. Yet where is the man who does not sin by the tongue ? "The same is a perfect man," says the Apostle St. James.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Si quis in verbo non offendit, hic perfectus est vir* Jac. iii. 2).

Indeed, so close is the connection between word and thought that he who never lets slip an inconsiderate word, a word that betrays a want of dignity or of purpose, or one that lessens the deference due to authority, or violates the claims imposed by charity and discretion—he certainly must have a store of self-control that never fails him, a self-control that presupposes long habits of thoughtful concentration and an exceptional strength of will and perseverance, all of which are signs of advanced perfection, and, indeed, marks of sanctity.

Would it be wronging you, my dear friends, to presume that many of you are far from this ideal?

Withdrawn as you are here from all that flatters the senses and appeals to the lower appetites, your imaginations are chaste and your hearts pure; and you may therefore be surprised to hear me insist on the necessity of your being reserved in your language. However, your circumstances later on will be very different from your circumstances here, and it is of importance for you to foresee them. Let your friendships always be noble ones, and neither in thought nor in conversation with one another let them ever sink to the level of those frivolous affections which look upon the creature as an end, instead of using it as a means of rising towards the Creator. But I do not intend to dwell upon this delicate subject; the line of conduct you are to adopt is expressed in these words of Holy Writ: "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh." If your thoughts are pure, your words



will take care of themselves ; and reserve in your language will be a safeguard for the purity of your souls. Watch over your impressions, govern the impatience that may be inherent in your nature, give no vent to it by complaints or sullen humours or disagreeable words. Silence is a safe stronghold for the will that is trying to control a fretful disposition. Could anything be nobler than the silence of Jesus before Pilate, in the presence of accusations that He could so easily have refuted ? “ And He answered not a word, so that the governor wondered exceedingly.”<sup>1</sup> One day, as you well know, you will put both your hands between mine, and, to this question of the Roman Pontifical, “ Do you promise me and my successors reverence and obedience ?”<sup>2</sup> you will answer, while your hearts are throbbing with holy joy under the influence of the Sacrament, “ Yes, *I promise.*”<sup>3</sup> Is it not, then, of great importance to acquire now the strength of will demanded by the obligations to which that solemn engagement will bind you for life ?

And yet, when your Superiors make some changes or introduce some reform, when your masters apply some rule of the Seminary, or give an opinion as to the admission or the date of admission to Orders, does criticism never raise its voice amongst you ? Now, are you so situated as to be aware of all the

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus autem non respondit ei ad ullum verbum, ita ut miraretur præses vehementer* (Matt. xxvii. 14).

<sup>2</sup> *Promittis mihi et successoribus meis reverentiam et obedientiam ?*

<sup>3</sup> *Promitto.*

different sides of the subject upon which you give your opinion with so much assurance? Would it not be fairer to withhold your judgment, to say to yourselves that your Superiors have consciences as well as you, and that, if their decision differs from yours, it is, doubtless, because they have knowledge of things which are unknown to you, and that they see clearly things of which you have only an inkling? Does criticism of this sort come from anything like wilful spite? By no means; I believe, on the contrary, that, oftener than not, it springs from mere thoughtlessness. When at evening you recall to your minds the thoughtless conversations that you have engaged in during the day, I am sure the remembrance of them pains you; all the same, your disparaging remarks have lowered authority in the minds of your fellow-students; their delicacy of conscience has been impaired thereby, and henceforward it will be less easy for them to abandon themselves entirely to the enlightened direction of their Superiors. By careless, heedless words one is particularly exposed to the danger of wounding charity. There are many young men who have a strong propensity to see, in preference to everything else, the ridiculous or the grotesque; and wherever this is to be found, their sharp eyes are sure to light upon it. They are, as a rule, bright, overflowing with spirits, full of fun in conversation, and their company is sought after on account of the amusement they afford. In this case the defect arises from the abuse or the misuse of a gift. By all

means divert your companions at the right time by your fun and your wit ; charity requires us to render our society agreeable to our neighbour ; besides, it was not unintentionally that God created so great a diversity of natures that there are no two alike. I by no means wish to suppress your individual qualities, nor to impose on impulsive natures a restraint that would bring them to a dead level with the others, destroying the charm of their conversation and thus introducing into your social life a tiresome monotony. But wit and humour must be kept within certain bounds. Be not the one to joke always and about everything : for your own sake, first of all, for the jester soon loses the respect of men. “ He who is wont to make others laugh does not generally make himself respected,” says La Bruyère. Refrain for the sake of others, also. It would, indeed, be bad enough if jesters, either unable or unwilling to do better, were content with never looking on the serious side of life or business in matters that concern themselves ; but what is quite intolerable is that they prevent others from giving their attention to the serious affairs of life. Dissipation is contagious in human society ; those who are witnesses of it find it very hard not to become accomplices. Little by little the gravity of more serious minds relaxes and even disappears ; untimely jokes weaken the usual influence of thoughtful minds ; sometimes, even at critical moments, they render impossible or futile the discussion of the most important affairs. In the next place, let it not be

forgotten that from the joker to the buffoon there is but one step—a step which is often and easily taken. The baneful influence of a man given over to buffoonery is well known. His associates copy him, and in a very short time all their dignity has vanished ; their capacity for enthusiasm is blighted ; the motive power which their souls once possessed is weakened ; while the native delicacy of their intelligence becomes hopelessly blunted.

Another defect which we must include in this same condemnation is the misuse of wit. I do not allude here to spiteful and satirical minds that deliberately seek to wound ; those are out of the question, as being the very antipodes of Christian charity ; I speak only of that habit—rather common amongst men of wit—of taking people indiscriminately as targets for their shafts. Here again the danger lies in the abuse of a gift. Wit is an ornament of the intellect, and an elegant one. Wit is to thought like a sense of touch that guides it directly to what is most to the purpose ; but it is dangerous to indulge in it for its own sake, to cultivate it as a sport, and to practise it heedlessly on others. Now, the weak point of many intellectual people lies in the fact that they cannot master the natural vivacity of their minds ; when they come in contact with the ridiculous in others, they cannot refrain from lashing it with some witty words. Their critical imaginations revel in the little comedies of human life. These are often laughable enough, it is true, but on this class of men they appear to act



like electricity, drawing from them sparks that dazzle the bystanders. Then, their vanity and self-love enjoy a secret satisfaction when they have shown how ready they are at repartee, or how clever they are at scourging some unfortunate fellow-creature for the amusement of an audience. This is not rare, and, as a rule, people do not sufficiently weigh the gravity of it. We meet with practical Catholics, sometimes even with priests, who are brilliantly gifted, kind-hearted, pious men ; they seem to have every quality required for doing a great amount of good ; and they do none ! Why ? Because it is their misfortune to have an ironical and stinging tongue. Their conversation is fascinating, their clever rejoinders flash like rockets ; but, alas ! it is nearly always their neighbour, with his little foibles and hobbies, his awkwardness and ill-luck, his infirmities even, that supplies the tormentors with such brilliant fireworks. They go straight ahead, never suspecting even that the amusement they afford and the laughter they provoke are a source of humiliation and of silent suffering to their victim. And how often, after a dinner or a tea-party, where a brilliant talker has done wonders, one or other of the guests goes home with a heavy heart, his feelings and his dignity cruelly wounded by merciless wit ! Let the future priest, above all others, beware of the temptation to shine in society, if nature has made him a witty talker. The real root of the satirical mind, the mind that throws ridicule not on things but on persons, is harshness

and contempt. And people do not misunderstand such a one, for in general they feel mockery more deeply than insult. The celebrated moralist I have quoted also says : " Those who deprive us of our goods by violence or by injustice, or who injure our reputation by calumny, show us thereby their dislike for us, but they do not show us thereby that they have lost all esteem for us ; consequently we can pardon or tolerate them, and perhaps some day even give them back our friendship. Mockery, on the contrary, is of all injuries the one we are least capable of forgiving. It is the language of contempt, and a most successful way of making this cut to the quick. It attacks a man in his last entrenchment, which is the good opinion he has of himself ; it tries to make him ridiculous in his own eyes ; it convinces him that his aggressor entertains the worst possible feelings towards him ; it makes him quite irreconcilable. It is, indeed, a monstrous thing, this facility we have for railing at others, ridiculing and despising them."<sup>1</sup>

I know well that your hearts are not bad, that you are not spiteful or vindictive ; neither do I tax you with being cruel. I only ask you, in the first place : Do you not often heedlessly do to others that which you would not have them do to you ? In the next place I ask you : When you see your neighbour robbed of his good name, are you not like the priest and the Levite, who passed by the wounded man on the road to Jericho, coldly and unkindly leaving the

<sup>1</sup> La Bruyère, " Caractères," ch. xi., " De l'Homme."

Good Samaritan to pour the oil of charity over his wounds ?

There are still other causes of thoughtlessness in words. For instance, you accidentally discover some secret ; you know well that you are bound to keep it, but a moment comes when you can show how much better informed you are than others. The secret is burning your lips, and out it surely comes. No sooner is the indiscretion committed than you would give much to recall your words ; but it is too late : the harm is done. The consequences will follow their natural course, and you yourself will probably lose the esteem of others if your dishonourable conduct becomes known.

Then, again, are there not some who love to hear themselves talk, like the little child that chatters all day merely to satisfy the natural impulse of practising and developing its organs of speech ? Do not others, again, yield to the temptation of speaking always about themselves, of narrating the most insignificant details that interest themselves, and no one else, at the risk of becoming a nuisance to serious people ?

Once more I hear you say you do not *mean* to act thus. Whenever an imprudence is committed, whenever any harm is done, you shirk the responsibility of it by saying you did not *mean* it. But that is just where you are in the wrong. To *mean* to do a thing is to think of it beforehand, and that is just what you fail to do—you *do not think*. Why was reason given you if not to enlighten you on the

natural consequences of your actions, and to enable you to direct your life according to the rules of experience ? To what use do you apply your liberty if not to master your impulses ? Suppose you try upon yourselves this useful experiment : in the silence of your own rooms pass in review each conversation you have held during the day. Try to remember of whom you spoke and what you said of each. Then make up your accounts. Of whom did you speak well ? Of how many, on the contrary, did you speak ill ? Renew every evening for one week this examination of conscience. You will probably be frightened at the number of your unfavourable criticisms of those in authority over you, of your little defamatory speeches, of your uncharitable witticisms, of your indiscreet and frivolous words ; but you will no doubt be astounded at the small number of those of whom you have spoken well. By *well* I mean really, positively *well*, not that sort of kindness that only serves as a palliative or preface to criticism too bitter to be accepted without some rhetorical precaution. You will learn in this way to measure the perfection that results from a sinless use of the tongue. " If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."<sup>1</sup> Remember that you are bound to be this " perfect man " ; so reflect, I beg of you, on your future responsibilities. The confidence of the faithful has given to the priest, no matter how young he may be,

<sup>1</sup> *Si quis in verbo non offendit, hic perfectus est vir* (Jac. iii. 2).



the name of *presbyter*, "man of ripe age," thus marking the gravity that your priestly character and your mission require of you. Interests of the most serious kind will be placed in your hands; attracted by the habit you wear and by the sacred character of your priesthood, the faithful will trust in you with a filial confidence. Now, in the service of what is most precious under the sun—that is, of human souls and their eternal welfare—would you be wanting in the application, the discernment, the prudence, the wisdom that a lawyer brings to the examination of a case, a doctor to the care of the sick, a merchant to the management of purely material concerns?

"Oh," says Dupanloup, "let it be known to youth, especially to youth destined for the priesthood, and let not those in charge of their training leave them in ignorance of the fact, that levity in the youth clings to the man through his whole lifetime—wherever he goes, whatever he does, he carries it with him. If a priest be born with this moral weakness, and if a firm clerical education does not rid him of it, he will carry it with him into his sacerdotal functions, into his most delicate intercourse with his fellow-men, and even into the awful ministry of which it is said, 'The care of souls is the art of arts.'<sup>1</sup> Alas! what a shepherd, what a director of souls such a one will be!"

"And he will be all the more dangerous," adds this writer, "because his unconscious rashness will drive

<sup>1</sup> *Ars artium regimen animarum.*



him recklessly into the gravest concerns, and the less aware he is of their gravity, and the more incapable he is of measuring their difficulty, the more assurance will he display in his way of cutting the Gordian knot."<sup>1</sup>

## II

### THE DISCIPLINE OF THE TONGUE

My dear friends, let us now see what means you are to employ in order that your words may have the qualities required by St. James: the delicacy, the patient reserve, the respect for authority, the charity, the discretion, the modesty—all that goes to form what he considers a distinctive index of perfection.

The examination of conscience which I proposed to you in the first part of this Conference has no doubt suggested the resolutions requisite for an irreproachable—let us say rather a virtuous—use of speech. Consequently, I can be briefer in this, the practical part, and in order that it may carry more weight and at the same time be more interesting, I shall give the advice I think useful for you by a rapid commentary on the Catholic Epistle of St. James.

It is a matter of the deepest moment, the Apostle tells us, to consider the prominence of the part played in our moral lives, either for good or for evil, by that apparently insignificant organ, the tongue.

<sup>1</sup> Dupanloup, "On Education," vol. iii., ch. ii.

A mettlesome horse exposes his rider to danger ; but a prudent horseman puts a bit in the mouth of his steed ; he curbs its spirit, and is master of all its movements. See those large vessels driven by the violence of the wind ; a very small apparatus, the helm, enables the pilot to guide them according to his will. So is it with the tongue ; like the bit, like the helm, it is capable of producing the most wonderful effects. Is not a single spark enough to set on fire a whole forest ? Again I say, so is it with the tongue. A wicked tongue can be compared to a spark thrown out by the fire of hell : it spreads evil through all our being, even to its inmost recesses.

There are no animals, how wild soever, but can be tamed by the power of man ; yet he seems incapable of mastering his own tongue ; it is a permanent source of difficulty and trouble. Take even a religious-minded man who uses his tongue to praise his Heavenly Father ; he will employ it also to injure his fellow-man, made, like himself, to the image of God. A blessing and a curse proceed from the same lips. That should not be so. Cast an eye over all nature and see if there be a single spring that yields both sweet and bitter waters. Does the fig-tree produce grapes, or the vine figs ?

Who among you wishes to be wise and well disciplined ? Let his behaviour prove that he has learnt the value of gentleness and wisdom. Let him not think much of his progress in virtue, if he nourishes within his heart feelings of bitterness or

animosity, for in that case his judgment would be an illusion. His apparent wisdom would not be from above, but from below—worldly, earthy, even diabolical—for a factious and jealous spirit can breed only trouble and evil of every kind. The wisdom that comes from above engenders modesty and the spirit of peace: it is condescending: it yields to the wishes of others: it is fruitful in charity and good works: it abstains from criticism and abhors all dissimulation. Those who work for peace will reap in peace the fruits of justice which they have sown.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Si quis in verbo non offendit, hic perfectus est vir, potest etiam freno circumducere totum corpus. Si (Greek ἰδε, "ecce") autem equis frena in ora mittimus ad consentiendum nobis, et omne corpus illorum circumferimus. Ecce et naves, quam magnæ sint et a ventis validis minentur, circumferuntur a modico gubernaculo, ubi impetus dirigentis voluerit. Ita et lingua modicum quidem membrum est et magna exaltat. Ecce, quantus ignis (Greek ὀλίγον πῦρ, "[parvus ignis]"), quam magnam silvam incendit! Et lingua ignis est; universitas iniquitatis lingua constituitur in membris nostris, quæ maculat totum corpus et inflamat rotam nativitatis nostræ, inflammata a gehenna. Omnis enim natura bestiarum et volucrum et serpentium et ceterorum domantur et domita sunt a natura humana; linguam autem nullus hominem domare potest: inquietum malum, plena veneno mortifero. In ipsa benedicimus Deum et Patrem, et in ipsa maledicimus homines, qui ad similitudinem Dei facti sunt. Ex ipso ore procedit benedictio et maledictio. Non oportet, fratres mei, hæc ita fieri. Numquid fons de eodem foramine emanat dulcem et amaram aquam? Numquid potest, fratres mei, ficus uvas facere aut vitis ficus? Sic neque salsa dulcem potest facere aquam. Quis sapiens et disciplinatus inter vos? Ostendat ex bona conversatione operationem suam in mansuetudine sapientiæ. Quod si zelum amarum habetis et contentiones sint in cordibus*



What need is there to add that experience confirms this teaching of St. James on the good or evil use of speech? But experience also reveals the general inattention of men, even of practical Catholics, to this grave subject. They seem to take little heed of the serious obligation imposed upon them, demanding, as it does, in the interests of their own perfection and in those of social concord, that they maintain an active and unceasing control over their words.

My dear friends, do not, then, be indifferent to the smallest sins of the tongue. A light word that wounds a fellow-creature, one which you consider quite insignificant, may perhaps have for him a disastrous effect that cannot be foreseen by you. You may have come across the following anecdote about St. Philip Neri. No effort of his had been able to convince one of his penitents of the harm done by her heedless tongue; so one day, in the hope of succeeding at last, he gave her a severe and very puzzling penance. She was to go through the streets of Rome plucking a fowl, and strewing its feathers along her path. She obeyed with great docility, and then came back to the saint to ask him the meaning of

---

*vestris, nolite gloriari et mendaces esse adversus veritatem; non est enim ista sapientia desursum descendens, sed terrena, animalis, diabolica. Ubi enim zelus et contentio, ibi inconstantia et omne opus pravum. Quæ autem desursum est sapientia, primum quidem pudica est, deinde pacifica, modesta, suadibilis, bonis consentiens, plena misericordia et fructibus bonis, non judicans, sine simulatione. Fructus autem justitiæ in pace seminatur facientibus pacem* (Jac. iii. 2-18).

this strange injunction. "Go home now," said he, "and on your way pick up all those feathers which you cast to the winds." "Do you think I am mad?" asked the lady. "Not less mad," replied the confessor, "than when, after casting to the four winds of public opinion your calumnies, slanders, and indiscreet words, you flatter yourself that a tardy regret on your part will restore to your neighbour the good name of which you have robbed him."

Besides, it is no exaggeration to say that this carelessness about the sins of the tongue is in a great measure the reason why so much discredit falls on numbers of pious people, and through them on religion itself.

But I hasten to return to the principal idea of this Conference. The object I have in view just now is not so much to dwell on the harm rash words can do to our neighbour, as to induce you to strive after your own personal perfection. I wish to inculcate an earnest solicitude for proper control over the expression of your thoughts. St. Charles Borromeo was aiming at this when, in his "Rules for the General Direction of Seminaries," he wrote :

"As silence contributes greatly to the maintenance of peace and piety, and wards off many an occasion of discord, they [the Seminarists] shall not hold conversation except in case of necessity, especially before and after prayers, Mass, examination of conscience, and reception of the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. This does not

apply to recreation-time, when they may talk, though not too loudly, upon any useful subject.

"They shall refrain from vain or improper talk, from all carping at one another, and from all words that might be in any way wounding ; neither shall they say anything to their own credit unless they can thereby render service to their neighbour."<sup>1</sup>

I remember hearing one of you during a recent literary debate recall the wise advice given by Bos-suet to the Dauphin to impress upon him the educa-tive value of grammatical correctness. "Prince," said the Preceptor, "do not fancy you are reprov-ed so severely during your studies merely for having violated the rules of grammar in the words and phrases of your exercises. It certainly is shameful for a Prince, for an intelligent child, who ought to observe order in all things, to make mistakes so great as these ; but we do not blame you so much for the mistakes themselves as for the source from which they spring. This lack of application now

<sup>1</sup> *Cum silentium permultum ad pacis pietatisque conserva-tionem, ad studia, et ad multas perturbationes evitandas conferat, numquam colloquantur, nisi de rebus necessariis ; idque præcipue ante et post orationem, missam, examen conscientiae, sanctissimorum Pœnitentiæ ac Eucharistiæ Sacramentorum perceptionem ; præterquam relaxationis tem-pore, quo de rebus utilibus sermones habere, sine tumultu tamen licebit.*

*Vitent autem minus honesta verba inanesque colloquutiones : alios inter loquendum ne carpent, aut quovis modo lædant : neque vero se ipsos laudent, nisi cum ad proximi fructum id est necessario faciendum ("Institutiones ad universum Semin-arii regimen pertinentes," Pars III., cap. iii.).*

makes you upset the order of words ; but if we allow it to grow and gain strength within you, you will one day upset the order of the State, when you have to handle no longer words only, but the things they represent. You now disregard the laws of grammar ; you will then despise the precepts of reason. Now you misplace words ; then you will misplace things, and you will sin against order in everything.”<sup>1</sup>

My dear friends, if we insist so strongly on the need of battling against the sin of light words and heedless actions—an insistence which to your inexperience may seem an exaggeration—yet believe us when we say with Bossuet : “ We do not blame you so much for the mistakes themselves as for the source from which they spring.”

The conclusion to be drawn from these first Conferences is condensed into those words of the great Bishop of Meaux. The spirit of solitude is necessary < for the soul's elevation. > Concentration of thought—what Bossuet calls “application”—is the only means by which we can attain to the spirit of solitude. <

On the other hand, the connection between our thoughts and our words is so close that reflection naturally begets moderation and sobriety in speech ; while, inversely, this attentive control over our words reacts on the application of our higher faculties to the invisible realities which form the chief object of our moral and spiritual life, and are the goal of our earthly pilgrimage.

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, “ Œuvres,” vol. xxxiv., edit. Lebel.



Consider, then, with piety this advice of St. Bernard; meditate on it; let it penetrate into your daily lives : “ Love silence,” he says ; “ love to practise it, and to listen.” Be careful not to sin by the tongue. In this way only can you safeguard the inner and higher part of your being, and secure the most favourable dispositions for listening to the voice of God.

---

## FOURTH CONFERENCE

### THE VOICE OF GOD

*Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.*

"To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

In accordance with the commands of the Church, those amongst you who are already in Holy Orders begin each day with this prayer to our Creator: "Come, let us praise the Lord with joy; let us sing joyfully to God, our Saviour. Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise to Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods: the Lord will not cast off His people. . . . For in His hand are all the ends of the earth, and the heights of the mountains He beholdeth. For the sea is His, and He made it; and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us adore and fall down, and weep before the Lord that made us; for He is the Lord our God, and we are His people and the sheep of His pasture."

The Holy Spirit, who dictated this prayer to the

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xciv. 8

Psalmist, adds : " To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, according to the day of temptation in the wilderness. . . . Forty years long was I offended with this generation, and I said : These always err in heart, and these men have not known My ways ; so I swore in My wrath that they shall not enter into My rest."<sup>1</sup>

My dear friends, how many Christian souls there are, not only in the world, but in the cloister, and even amongst the ministers of Christ, who are flooded with the light and warmth of Divine grace, and yet spend twenty, thirty, forty years of their existence without perceiving that their Saviour is nigh unto them, that it is He who is speaking to their hearts, opening to them providential paths of access to Himself, or even at times, it may be, filling them with fear that the view of the Promised Land may be withheld for ever from their longing eyes. The primary cause of this lamentable blindness is always the same : men do not enter into their hearts and think ; their hearts wander off in pursuit of passing frivolities ; and all the while God is whispering to their souls, but His voice remains unheeded, for they do not stop to listen to it. " O ye sons of men, how long will ye be dull of heart ? Why do ye love vanity, and seek after lying ?

<sup>1</sup> *Hodie si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra ; sicut in exacerbatione secundum diem tentationis in deserto. Quadraginta annis proximus fui generatione huic et dixi : Semper hi errant corde, et isti non cognoverunt vias meas, ut juravi in ira mea, si introibunt in requiem meam (Ps. xciv.).*

Know ye also that the Lord hath made His Holy One wonderful : the Lord will hear me when I shall cry unto Him."<sup>1</sup>

I have earnestly exhorted you, my dear friends, to love retirement, to love silence—the silence both of the soul and of the lips ; I have striven to show you how important it is to control your words in order that you may govern your thoughts ; and in giving you these counsels my object has been to put you in the best possible dispositions for listening to the voice of God, for God does speak within you, and wishes you to heed His words.

## I

### GOD SPEAKS WITHIN YOU

" God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all, in these days hath spoken to us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world : who, being the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, making purgation of sins, sitteth on the right hand of His majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent name than they."<sup>2</sup> *Heb. i. 1-4*

<sup>1</sup> *Filii hominum, usquequo gravi corde, ut quid diligitis vanitatem et quæritis mendacium? Et scitote quoniam mirificavit Dominus sanctum suum: Dominus exaudiet me cum clamavero ad eum* (Ps. iv.).

<sup>2</sup> Heb. i. 1-4.



Now, remarks St. Paul, "if the word spoken by angels became steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? which having begun to be declared by the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Ghost according to His own will."<sup>1</sup>

Sacred and most worthy of all respect is the word of God contained in the inspired books of both the New and the Old Testament; sacred the oral teaching bequeathed to the Church by the Apostles; sacred the authentic exposition their successors have given us of the doctrine handed down to them. Yet all these venerable documents are but a dead letter if the interior communication of the Holy Ghost to the faithful soul does not breathe into them supernatural life, as of old under the action of the Most High the word of Ezechiel breathed life into the bones that were dead.

In this lies the whole secret of the spiritual life. "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit

<sup>1</sup> *Propterea abundantius oportet observare nos ea, quæ audivimus, ne forte pereffluamus. Si enim qui per angelos dictus est sermo factus est firmus, et omnis prævaricatio et inobedientia accepit justam mercedis retributionem: quomodo nos effugiemus, si tantam neglexerimus salutem? quæ quum initium accepisset enarrari per Dominum, ab eis, qui audierunt, in nos confirmata est, contestante Deo signis et portentis et variis virtutibus et Spiritus sancti distributionibus secundum suam voluntatem (Heb. ii. 1-4).*

and life."<sup>1</sup> Without the first impulse of grace from God we can make no step towards salvation.

"Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God."<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 13:5

The sap does not work downwards from the branches; it rises from the root and spreads upwards through the whole vine, even to its tiniest tendrils. "Abide in Me," says our Saviour, "and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine: you are the branches. He that abideth in Me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone abide not in Me he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire and he burneth."<sup>3</sup>

This life which Jesus Christ declares to come from Him is the supernatural or Christian life. Beyond this outer world which our eyes can behold, which our hands can touch, there is an invisible one which human thought can grasp. The pagan thinkers of old used to live in intimate contact with the Invisible, and there is no man, be he never so low in the scale of civilization, who does not at times yearn after a fuller comprehension of the mysterious realities that lie above and beyond the sphere of ordinary material things.)

<sup>1</sup> *Verba autem mea spiritus et vita sunt* (John vi. 64).

<sup>2</sup> *Non sumus sufficientes cogitare aliquid ex nobis, quasi ex nobis, sed omnis sufficientia nostra ex Deo est* (2 Cor. iii. 5).

<sup>3</sup> John xv. 4-6.

But the sum of our purely rational speculation is no more than the consciousness of a Being who is superior to this universe, the existence of a distinct Cause of the universe, of some Being who is the ultimate goal of the movement therein produced. Inquire of reason what God is *not*. She will be able to tell you, though her answer will often be very indistinct ; but do not question her as to what positively and in very truth God *is*, and what is the life He lives : she would remain as silent as a beast of the field before a problem of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In his commentary on the "Book of Divine Names," by (Pseudo) Denis the Areopagite, St. Thomas of Aquin remarks that no name we can give to God can be rightly applied to Him unless qualified by some negation. The followers of Plato admitted that the expressions *Life*, *Being*, *Intelligence* are subject to this condition, but they excepted the term *Goodness* from this general law. "No," declares St. Thomas, "even though the attribute is the noblest of all, it is not, in its obvious sense and without any qualification, applicable to God. To express the truth we must, after affirming that God is good, at once add that He is not good in our way, but in a way differing completely from that of any of His creatures, even the best of them.

*Manifestum est enim quod hoc nomen bonum, cum sit a nobis impositum, non signat nisi quod nos mente capimus. Unde, cum Deus sit supra mentem nostram, superexcedit hoc nomen. Et quia Theologi consideraverunt quod omne nomen a nobis impositum deficit a Deo, ideo ipsi inter omnes modos quibus in Deum possumus ascendere per intellectum præordinaverunt eum qui est per negationes, per quas quodam ordine in Deum ascendimus, Primo enim anima nostra quasi exsuscitatur et consurgit a rebus materialibus, quæ sunt animæ nostræ connaturalia : puta, cum intelligimus Deum non esse aliquid sensibile aut materiale, aut corporeum : et sic anima nostra negando pergit, "per omnes divinos intellectus," idest per omnes ordines*

What in His intimate life God is He alone knows, and He only could reveal it to us. "The things also that are of God no man knoweth but the Spirit of God."<sup>1</sup> He is that Spirit subsisting by Himself, who in thinking Himself engenders a Person distinct from Himself, Wisdom consubstantial with the Father; and from these two Persons proceeds, by a breath of mutual love, a Third Person, whose subsistence closes the circle of God's hidden life, and is in some sort the starting-point of the outward actions which in all freedom the Deity accomplishes in the bosom of His creation.

Now, as you all know, my dear friends—for it is the very substance of your *Credo*—this Divine life which is the Blessed Trinity's own, has become the inheritance of man, and it has become his inheritance by an absolutely gratuitous gift. Eternity itself will not be long enough to fathom its worth

*Angelorum, a quibus est segregatus Deus, qui est supra omne nomen et rationem et cogitationem. Ad ultimum autem anima nostra Deo conjungitur ascendendo per negationes "in ultimis totorum," idest in supremis finibus universaliorum et excellentiorum creaturarum. Et quidem conjunctio animæ ad Deum fit, inquantum nobis possibile est nunc Deo conjungi. Non enim conjungitur in præsentī intellectus noster Deo ut ejus essentiam videat, sed ut cognoscat de Deo quid non est. Unde hæc conjunctio nostri ad Deum, quæ nobis est in hac vita possibilis, perficitur quando devenimus ad hoc quod cognoscamus eum esse supra excellentissimas creaturās"* (St. Thomas, "Comm. in Lib. de Div. Nominibus," Cap. xiii., lect. iii.).

<sup>1</sup> *Quæ Dei sunt nemo cognovit, nisi Spiritus Dei* (1 Cor. ii. 11).



or to express our gratitude for it.) One day, when the splendour of celestial glory will have rent the veil which now hides the reality from our eyes, we shall see God as He is.<sup>1</sup> We shall see Him, the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost; and we shall distinctly understand then that, even here below, sanctifying grace made us really share His life, giving us the power to believe in what He in Himself sees, to hope for what He enjoys and is, to love Him with the love He bears Himself, and to love, for His sake, all whom He enfolds in the embrace of His infinite love. "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God."<sup>2</sup> "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."<sup>3</sup> "For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God."<sup>4</sup> In a word, he who "is joined to the Lord" forms with Him but "one spirit."<sup>5</sup>

This Divine life, which each of us in person is called to live, is within us. Faith, hope, charity, the moral virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost are all so many centres from which light and heat radiate unceasingly. The Eternal Wisdom is not an object

<sup>1</sup> *Videbimus eum sicuti est* (1 John iii. 2).

<sup>2</sup> 1 John iii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. v. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. viii. 14-16.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 17.

of sterile contemplation ; it breathes love into our hearts. *Sapientia spirans amorem.* The Holy Spirit is not isolated from us by a sepulchral stone ; He is as life-giving as He is holy—" the Lord and Life-giver." Even while we little suspect it, He breathes forth in the depths of our souls yearnings that no human words could render. " The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings."<sup>1</sup>

Listen to the Fathers of the Council of Trent : " As the head sends life through the members of the body, as the vine infuses life into all its branches, so Christ Jesus instils unceasingly into the souls of the just a virtue that precedes, accompanies, and follows their good works—a virtue without which these good works could in no wise be agreeable to God or meritorious. . . . Our Saviour said : ' He that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst for ever ; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.' "<sup>2</sup>

Would it not be madness, my dear friends, if, believing firmly by the faith of our Baptism that we are the permanent seat of these mysterious realities, we were deliberately to refuse our attention to them ? Remember what St. Paul says : " Know you not that

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritus adjuvat infirmitatem nostram ; nam quid oremus, sicut oportet, nescimus, sed ipse Spiritus postulat pro nobis gemitibus inenarrabilibus* (Rom. viii. 26).

<sup>2</sup> Sess. VI., c. xvi.

your members are the temples of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God ; and you are not your own.”<sup>1</sup> “ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 6:17

I do not mean to exaggerate anything. I know well that many things conspire to turn our thoughts from God. Visible things are constantly interfering, and we cannot tear ourselves away from their influence. Self is always on the alert, urging us to look with complaisance on what good there may be in us ; needless to add that our sins and the consequences of our sins widen the gulf between God and us. Then for the greater number there are the wants of daily life, with the effort and anxiety they entail. For us ministers of the altar there are absorbing studies ; and very often, too, the interests of others obtrude themselves and engross our attention. But at least ought we not to strive without ceasing to lighten as much as we can the load that makes our hearts so dull ? Would it not be fair, when business and intercourse with our fellow-men prevent our thoughts from dwelling on those mysterious operations of God going on within us—would it not be reasonable, I say, to heave towards God a sigh of regret that would be at the same time an act of love ? Let us strive to imitate the holy angels, of whom it is written that they go to and fro without ever diverting their

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Qui autem adhæret Domino, unus spiritus est* (1 Cor. vi. 17).

thoughts from the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. "They go up," says St. Bernard, "to contemplate God; through compassion for us they come down to guard us, but even while bending towards us they never cease to keep their eyes fixed upon the face of the Father." "Do as they do," adds the holy doctor: "bend mercifully towards your neighbour, but, like your guardian angel, let your desires soar upwards to the feet of God. With all the ardour of your souls strive to mount ever higher and higher towards the supreme and everlasting Truth. *Sursum corda*—lift up your hearts! Does not this summons come to you here day after day? Reproaching you with your negligence, God says: 'O children of men, how long will your hearts be dull and heavy? Wherefore do you feed on dreams and seek after falsehood?' The heart that has broken its bonds, the heart that is free, soars lightly on the wings of love towards the everlasting Truth."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sic beati illi spiritus ascendunt per contemplationem Dei, descendunt per compassionem tui ut custodiant te in omnibus viis tuis. . . . Nec tamen vel descendendo visione gloriæ fraudantur, quia semper vident faciem Patris. . . . Descendas et condescendas, exhibere scilicet proximo misericordiam: et sursum cum eodem angelo levans desideria tua, tota animi cupiditate ascendere studeas ad summam et perpetuam veritatem. Hinc enim monemur levare corda nostra cum manibus; hinc audimus quotidie: Sursum corda; Hinc quoque negligentes arguimur et dicitur nobis: Filii hominum, usquequo gravi corde? Ut quid diligitis vanitatem et quæritis mendacium? Exoneratum enim cor et leve levatur magis, ut quærat et diligit veritatem (St. Bernardus, in Ps. "Qui habitat," Sermo XI.).*



## II

## YOU MUST LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD

The fatherly solicitude of God extends to each and every one of us. Where is there a soul in this wide world over which God does not brood with love ineffable? Did He not liken Himself to the hen gathering her little ones under her wings? The very concept of the supernatural life communicated to us, a life the focus of which dwells within ourselves, presupposes the formation of a permanent disposition to welcome the diffusion of Divine grace within our intellects and wills, these being thereby both incited to action and sustained in their effort. The experience of souls who are attentive to what goes on within them bears witness to the living reality of this action from above.

How is it, then, that the voice of God is not more distinctly heard by men?

The answer to this question is: To be heard it must be listened for.

1. In the first place—and so clear is it that it need scarcely be pointed out—it is essential not to turn away one's attention from the whisperings of God. "No man is so deaf," says the proverb, "as he who will not hear." In a recent pastoral letter we mentioned this necessary condition, when, appealing to men of goodwill, we said to them: God, after all, requires of you but one thing—that *you be honest with yourselves.* "Lord," said the Psalmist, "who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, or who shall rest in

Thy holy hill? He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice: he that speaketh truth in his heart, who hath not used deceit in his tongue: nor hath done evil to his neighbour, nor taken up a reproach against his neighbours.”<sup>1</sup>

Outward serenity tells the tale of inward sanctity. “If thine eye be single”—that is, if there be rectitude in thy intentions—“thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome.”<sup>2</sup>

The presence of God in a soul banishes thence all darkness. “God is light,” says St. John, “and in Him there is no darkness. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.”<sup>3</sup>

My beloved sons, how could you be holy without rectitude, and how could you think yourselves honest if by the clear guidance of your conscience you perceive your duty, and yet resolve to ignore it, to leave it unfulfilled?

I make no distinction now between serious faults and light ones, between a sin that is mortal and one that is venial or is only a wilful imperfection. I declare this general truth, which in spiritual matters has all the self-evidence of an axiom: in the same measure as your will deliberately rebels

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xiv. 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Si oculus tuus fuerit simplex, totum corpus tuum lucidum erit. Si autem oculus tuus fuerit nequam, totum corpus tuum tenebrosum erit* (Matt. vi. 22, 23).

<sup>3</sup> *Deus lux est, et tenebræ in eo non sunt ullæ. Si dixerimus quoniam societatem habemus cum eo et in tenebris ambulamus, mentimur et veritatem non facimus* (1 John i. 5, 6).

against an order clearly intimated by your conscience, in that same measure do you impede the work of the Holy Ghost in your souls. You paralyze them in their upward flight. When you question your own hearts calmly, loyally, can you bear witness to yourselves that you find therein no attachment of which your conscience disapproves, that they hide no inordinate affection for pleasure, for self, or for the good things of this life? If the answer be "No," then you bear within you the root from which holiness springs, and the conquests which God and the Church expect you to achieve are only a matter of time and of fidelity to grace; but if the voice of your conscience sounds a note of reproach, stop short and listen. If you turn your attention elsewhere just then you will sink into the depths of self-deception and prepare for yourselves the many and bitter troubles that result therefrom. When you look this discovery in the face, throw yourself on your knees and *pray*. Implore God to hasten to your help. Repeat without ceasing: "*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison; Deus in adjutorium meum intende, Domine ad adjuvandum me festina.*" Pray, and go on praying till you triumph over the resistance of your heart. In this case, never doubt of it, your prayer will most infallibly be heard. "Ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Let your prayer be accompanied by mortification and almsgiving. Ask your friends to give you the assistance of their



prayers. Receive frequently the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. In a word, neglect no means of obtaining from God the courage you require. But be firm, I implore you, till you come victorious out of this strife, be it never so bitter, be it never so long ! The peace of your whole life and the success of your future apostolate are at stake ; they depend upon the issue of this battle.

If, on the contrary, you know your heart to be free, remain in peace, and render thanks to God. You certainly will commit imperfections ; you will sometimes slip on your road. Who knows if God will not some day permit you to bear the shame of a mortal sin ? Let not your courage fail ; do not even be inordinately surprised at the depth of your weakness. Perhaps God sits waiting for you at this bend of the road to instil into your hearts a feeling of deeper humility ; for what humbles a soul more efficaciously than the realization of its own weakness ? He may also have a lesson to give you on true and heartfelt compassion for the weakness of your fellow-men.

After your period of humiliation you will promptly rise again, for you bear within your heart a fountain-head of grace ever ready to flow. The Holy Ghost, whom you have saddened for a moment, will bring you face to face with the justice of God ; you will find comfort in acknowledging its rights and in offering yourself to its legitimate severity. Almost at the same moment He will put you in presence of the infinite mercy of our Heavenly Father and of



our beloved Saviour Jesus. It will need no effort, O Prodigal Son of one day, to remember the delights of the home you have left. Scarcely will you have thrown yourself at your Father's feet, scarcely will your words of sorrow have reached His ear, than His Divine arms will press you to His heart, and you will hear Him whisper : My son that " was dead is come to life again ; he was lost and is found." <sup>1</sup>

2. And yet, to hear distinctly the voice of God, it does not suffice to abstain from turning a deaf ear to it ; neither will it do merely to listen to it when it speaks : you must listen *for* it with an attentive ear.

You are aware of the part attention plays in the science of education, and you have learnt that the way to sustain it is to awaken the interest of the learner. The heart is eager for what is pleasing to it, and the livelier the attachment of the will to what it loves, the more closely will it apply the cognitive powers under its control to the object loved by it, so as to make them consider, penetrate, and comprehend it. This general law which governs the cognition of the mind applies all the more to truths of the religious order, as these, on account of their hidden character, require a more strenuous concentration of thought, and consequently a more solid ground of effort for the will. Only in proportion to your desire for it will you make progress in the inner life of the soul. Almost the whole of the eighth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans would find a fitting place here. " Whosoever are led

<sup>1</sup> Luke xv. 32.



by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.<sup>1</sup> For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear ; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry : Abba (Father). . . . For the expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God. . . . For we know that every creature groaneth and travaileth in pain until now. . . .<sup>2</sup> And not only it, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope. . . . Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought : but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the spirit desireth, because He asketh for the saints according to God."<sup>3</sup>

Psalm xxiv. is an ardent expression of this yearning of the soul towards God. " Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths. Direct me in Thy truth, and teach me ; for Thou art my God, my Saviour ; and on Thee have I waited all the day long. . . . Mine eyes are ever towards the Lord. . . . Look Thou upon me, and have mercy on me."

<sup>1</sup> *Quicumque enim spiritu Dei aguntur, Ii sunt filii Dei* (Rom. viii. 14).

<sup>2</sup> *Omnis creatura ingemescit et parturit usque adhuc. . . .* (Rom. viii. 22).

<sup>3</sup> *Ipse spiritus postulat pro nobis gemitibus inenarrabilibus ; qui autem scrutator corda, scit quid desideret spiritus, quia secundum Deum postulat pro sanctis* (Rom. viii. 26, 27).

And all through Psalm cxviii., which we recite every day, are to be found such expressions of deep yearning as could proceed only from the most ardent love. "My soul hath fainted after Thy salvation, and in Thy word I have very much hoped. My eyes have failed for Thy word, saying : When wilt Thou comfort me? . . . I opened my mouth and panted, because I longed for Thy commandments. . . . Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant, and teach me Thy justifications. . . . I have cried with my whole heart ; hear me, O Lord : I will seek Thy justifications. . . . My eyes to Thee have prevented the morning, that I might meditate on Thy words. . . . I have longed for Thy salvation, O Lord : and Thy law is my meditation."<sup>1</sup>

Our Divine Lord has taught it to us most clearly : to be truly happy we must hunger and thirst after justice.<sup>2</sup> And the Blessed Virgin Mary sang in her *Magnificat* that those who are hungry shall receive in abundance the gifts of God, whereas those who are

<sup>1</sup> *Vias tuas, Domine, demonstra mihi, et semitas tuas edoce me. Dirige me in veritate tua et doce me, quia tu es Deus Salvator meus et te sustinui tota die. . . . Oculi mei semper ad Dominum. . . . Respice in me et miserere mei. . . . Defecit in salutare tuum anima mea et in verbum tuum supersperavi. Defecerunt oculi mei in eloquium tuum. . . . Os meum aperui et attraxi spiritum, quia mandata tua desiderabam. . . . Faciem tuam illumina super servum tuum et doce me justificationes tuas. . . . Clamavi in toto corde meo, exaudi me, Domine, justificationes tuas requiram. . . . Prævenierunt oculi mei ad te diluculo, ut meditarer eloquia tua. . . . Concupivi salutare tuum, Domine, et lex tua meditatio mea est. . . .*

<sup>2</sup> *Beati qui esuriunt et sitiunt justitiam quoniam ipsi saturabuntur* (Matt. v. 6).

satiated with the good things of this world will go away empty.<sup>1</sup> The hungry ones who are humble are those who are conscious of their incapacity, and who know that all they have has been given to them. The rich, the satiated ones, are the proud, who look upon themselves as the owners of that which is but a deposit entrusted to their keeping.

Seek your inspirations in our beautiful Liturgy. Its words will soon become familiar to your lips, and will enable your hearts to rise constantly towards God in what spiritual authors call ejaculatory prayers.

"Come, O Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of Thy faithful, and enkindle within them the fire of Thy love."

"Come, O Creator, Spirit blest !  
And in our souls take up Thy rest ;  
Come with Thy grace and heavenly aid,  
To fill the hearts which Thou hast made."

"Holy Spirit, Lord of light !  
From Thy clear celestial height  
Thy pure beaming radiance give.  
Come, Thou Father of the poor !  
Come with treasures which endure !  
Come, Thou Light of all that live ! . . .  
Light immortal ! Light Divine !  
Visit Thou these hearts of Thine,  
And our inmost being fill."

"Come Holy Ghost, who ever One  
Reignest with Father and with Son ;  
It is the hour : our souls possess  
With Thy full flood of holiness."

"May the grace of the Holy Ghost enlighten our minds and hearts."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes* (Luke i. 53).

<sup>2</sup> *Veni, sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum corda fidelium et tui amoris in eis ignem accende. Veni, Creator, Spiritus, mentes*



3. Finally, docility to the voice of God demands a third condition—quiet. It is easy to understand that agitation breeds confusion. When a soul is tossed about by the many winds of the passions, the imagination, the senses, how can she distinguish in the uproar the gentle breeze that wafts to her the Spirit of God? Has it not occurred, for instance, that when the time came for the yearly retreat your thoughts were scattered amidst outward distractions, or your mind absorbed in study, or else you were annoyed at having to interrupt some interesting work, and the consequence was that you went into solitude with reluctance, little suspecting the sweetness God had in store for you? As the retreat drew to a close you would have given much to prolong it, for the more it calmed your imagination and your nerves, the more you felt the charm of His presence who had withdrawn you from the turmoil to speak to your heart: “I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart.”<sup>1</sup> If you are of an ardent temperament, strive manfully to master your imagination, to govern the outbursts of your

---

*tuorum visita, imple superna gratia, quæ tu creasti pectora. Veni, sancte Spiritus, et emitte cœlitus, lucis tuæ radium Veni pater pauperum, veni dator munerum, veni lumen cordium. . . . O lux beatissima, reple cordis intima tuorum fidelium. . . . Nunc sancte nobis Spiritus, unum Patri cum Filio, dignare promptus ingeri, nostro refusus pectori. Spiritus sancti gratia illuminet sensus et corda nostra.*

<sup>1</sup> *Ducam illam in solitudinem et ibi loquar ad cor ejus* (Osee ii. 14).

temper. "Come and learn of Me," said our beloved Saviour, "because I am meek and humble of heart : and you will find rest to your souls."<sup>1</sup> Lie still in the hand of God, patiently waiting till, in His own good time, the Holy Spirit breathes upon your soul. "*Ego Dominus*," said the Eternal to Moses—I am the Lord. My wish is to lead thee on to holiness, and, on the one condition of thy willing co-operation, I shall certainly do so ; but I alone have marked the hour of thy starting ; I alone have traced out the paths thou art to follow. My providence for each one of you is altogether personal. As in the heavens there are not two stars alike, so in the firmament of souls each one differs from all the others. "*Star differeth from star in glory*." From all eternity I have marked out the path of each. To each I have once for all assigned a sufficient degree of grace, and marked out the heights he must scale in order to possess it. Let yourselves be led with the same docility as the Psalmist whom I inspired with these words, that he might unceasingly repeat them before Me : "Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths."<sup>2</sup>

Whatever thy past may have been, I hold out to thee now, at this very moment, a grace that suffices for thy present need. "A man going into a far country called his servants, and delivered to them his goods. And to one he gave five talents, and to

<sup>1</sup> *Discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde, et invenietis requiem animabus vestris* (Matt. xi. 29).

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xxiv. 4.

another two, and to another one, to every one according to his proper ability.”<sup>1</sup>

This is the grace thou must receive and make the most of, waiting humbly, submissively till I judge thee worthy of a higher gift. However moderate may seem to thee the grace thou hast received, guard it with humility and make it bear fruit. A day will come when I, thy Divine Master, will say to thee: “Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”<sup>2</sup>

The Apostle St. James tells us that patience is the crown of all virtue. “And patience hath a perfect work: that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing.”<sup>3</sup> May we not interpret these words as meaning that, even had you long and bravely striven to acquire every virtue, you would still need one thing more to make you perfect? And that thing would be the deeply-rooted feeling that you owe all you have and all you are to the munificent mercy of your God; that all He has done has been well done; that you will be sufficiently rewarded for your labours if He vouchsafes to cast

<sup>1</sup> *Homo peregre proficiscens vocavit servos suos et tradidit illis bona sua, et uni dedit quinque talenta, alii autem duo, alii vero unum, unicuique secundum propriam virtutem* (Matt. xxv. 14, 15).

<sup>2</sup> *Euge, serve bone et fidelis, quia super pauca fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam, intra in gaudium Domini tui* (Matt. xxv. 23).

<sup>3</sup> *Patientia opus perfectum habet, ut sitis perfecti et integri in nullo deficientes* (Jac. i. 4).

upon you one look of satisfaction. O faithful soul ! be satisfied with your lot ; be what you are, and love to be as God has made you. May His will alone be done on earth as it is in heaven. " To the King of all ages, immortal and invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever."<sup>1</sup>

### CONCLUSION

So, then, my very dear sons, you must energetically tear from your hearts every affection that would embarrass their upward flight. You must be earnestly attentive to the voice of God, humble, docile, and eager to hear it. You must repress the hurry and agitation to which nature is prone, so as to let your souls repose in calmness under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. If you observe faithfully these three conditions, the Lord will be your Guide, and nothing will be wanting to you, for He will place you in His own pastures. " The Lord ruleth me, and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture."<sup>2</sup>

Is there one of us who could say to what heights God would help him to rise were he completely submissive to the voice of the Holy Spirit within him ? What an efficient instrument of salvation he would become if he allowed the Spirit of God to be the initiator of all his acts, the ever-present all-pervading

<sup>1</sup> *Regi sæculorum immortalī et invisibili, soli Deo, honor et gloria in sæcula sæculorum* (Tim. i. 17).

<sup>2</sup> *Dominus regit me, et nihil mihi deerit, in loco pascuæ ibi me collocavit* (Ps. xxii. 1, 2).



influence therein ! And is it not quite reasonable that we should so behave ? Is not God our first beginning and our last end ? *Ego principium qui et loquor vobis* (John viii. 25). Oh, my dear friends, let us reform our lives once for all and thoroughly. Visible things, outward circumstances that strike us, the vicissitudes of politics and human history—all these float on the surface of time, and are carried off by the evening tide. They change as rapidly as the scenes in a theatre. “For the fashion of this world passeth away,” says St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> The true realities—indeed, the sole realities that count when all is told—are the invisible ones. The only important world is the one we bear within ourselves, the kingdom of God within us. *Regnum Dei intra vos est* (1 Cor. vii. 31). Think deeply on this truth ; meditate on it earnestly and perseveringly. “Meditate upon these things, be wholly in these things, that thy profiting may be manifest to all.”<sup>2</sup> Ask unceasingly of God to be the beginning and the end of all your prayers, of all your actions. “Prevent, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions by Thy inspirations, and further them with Thy assistance, that every prayer and work of ours may always begin from Thee and through Thee be likewise ended. Through Christ our Lord.”<sup>3</sup> 7

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 31.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Actiones nostras, quæsumus, Domine, aspirando præveni et adjuvando proseguere, ut cuncta nostra oratio et operatio a te semper incipiat et per te cœpta finiatur. Per Christum Dominum nostrum.*

## FIFTH CONFERENCE

### INTERCOURSE WITH GOD

*Nunc sancte nobis Spiritus,  
Unum Patri cum Filio,  
Dignare promptus ingeri,  
Nostro refusus pectori.*

“Come, Holy Ghost, who ever One  
Reignest with Father and with Son;  
It is the hour: our souls possess  
With Thy full flood of holiness.”<sup>1</sup>

*Hymn for Tierce.*

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

God speaks within us, and if His voice is faint and but seldom heard, it is solely because we do not keep our hearts sufficiently lifted up towards Him in the retirement of spirit which silence affords. Would that with truth we could say to Him all day long these words of the Psalmist: “With my whole heart have I sought after Thee.”<sup>2</sup> “Behold I have longed after Thy precepts.”<sup>3</sup> “I lifted up my hands to Thy commandments, which I loved.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Newman’s translation.

<sup>2</sup> *In toto corde meo exquisivi te.* . . . (Ps. cxviii. 10).

<sup>3</sup> *Ecce concupivi mandata tua* (Ps. cxviii. 40).

<sup>4</sup> *Et levavi manus meas ad mandata tua, quæ dilexi* (Ps. cxviii. 48).

“ My soul hath fainted after Thy salvation.”<sup>1</sup> “ My eyes have failed for Thy word ”<sup>2</sup>—that is, have spent themselves in the study thereof. “ My soul hath coveted to long for Thy justifications at all times.”<sup>3</sup> “ I opened my mouth and panted, because I longed for Thy commandments.”<sup>4</sup>

The more you acquire the habit of those ardent aspirations towards God which were so familiar to the saints, the more will you find God everywhere and in all things. He speaks to you unceasingly through the medium of His creatures. “ The heavens show forth the glory of God ;”<sup>5</sup> the wild motion of the sea, the crash of thunder, the flash of lightning as it splits the cedars and makes the desert tremble, all tell us of His power. “ The voice of the Lord is upon the waters ; . . . the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars ; . . . the voice of the Lord shaketh the desert.”<sup>6</sup>

Every morning, at the moment when the priest bears within his breast the God of the Eucharist, the Church calls on him to listen to the voice of creation, and to unite his thanksgiving to the song of praise sent up to the Creator from all nature.

<sup>1</sup> *Defecit in salutare tuum anima mea* (Ps. cxviii. 81).

<sup>2</sup> *Defecerunt oculi mei in eloquium tuum* (Ps. cxviii. 82).

<sup>3</sup> *Concupivit anima mea desiderare justificationes tuas in omni tempore* (Ps. cxviii. 20).

<sup>4</sup> *Os meum aperui et attraxi spiritum quia mandata tua desiderabam* (Ps. cxviii. 131, 132).

<sup>5</sup> *Cæli enarrant gloriam Dei* (Ps. xviii. 1).

<sup>6</sup> *Vox Domini super aquas. . . Vox Domini confringentis cedros et concutientis desertum* (Ps. xxviii. 3, 5).

God speaks to us also through the various incidents of life : a reverse of fortune or a struggle with temptation makes us turn instinctively towards Him. The death of some loved one opens up to us the vista of eternity. Some proof of ingratitude, some betrayal, some humiliation, detaches us from earth, and throws us into His arms. Sin gains an unexpected victory over us, and, confounded and prostrate before God, we fear His justice and appeal to His infinite mercy. So also do the joys of life draw us towards Him, creating in our hearts a keener feeling of gratitude for the kindness of our Heavenly Father.

Then, again, God speaks through the Holy Scriptures, through the teaching of the Church, through the rites and prayers of its Liturgy.

But, above all else, it is through the example of His life that our Divine Saviour speaks to us. Oh, with what truth did our beloved Redeemer say : " I have given you an example, that what I have done you may also do."<sup>1</sup> Let us consider Him in His humble crib, in the Temple, on the road to Egypt over the desert sands ; let us abide with Him in spirit in the bosom of the Holy Family at Nazareth ; let us follow Him through the weary wanderings of His public life, gathering into our hearts every word that falls from His Divine lips ; in company with Him let us bear fatigue in the service of our neighbour and learn to return good for evil ; like Him, too,

<sup>1</sup> *Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci ita et vos faciatis* (John xiii. 15).



let us be zealous for the glory of our Heavenly Father, putting before and above everything else the accomplishment of His most holy will. Let us linger in the guest-chamber at the washing of the feet ; at the institution of the adorable Eucharist ; in Gethsemane, in awe-struck contemplation of the tears and bloody sweat of the agonizing Christ. Let us follow Him to the prætorium, along the terrible way of the cross, to Calvary at last, and to the lonely grave hard by, keeping ever alive in our memory, with a gratitude as deep as our love, this hope-inspiring prophecy of our beloved Jesus : “ And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to Myself.”<sup>1</sup>

Some day, perhaps, your listening souls will be arrested by one of those all-powerful words of God that bring about a deep and lasting change, such as that heard by Saul on the road to Damascus, “ Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ?” Or the “ *Pater noster qui es in cælis* ” that rang through the soul of Francis of Assisi in the midst of his frivolous pleasures : “ Our Father who art in heaven ! *Thou* art enough for me. My God and my all. Thou art my God ; henceforth shalt Thou be everything to me.” Or, again, the voice that whispered to the soul of Bernard just as he was telling over in his memory the list of his disenchantments. “ Come unto Me,” it said, “ all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” So, too, with St. Francis Xavier, when, in the midst of his dreams of human, glory he

<sup>1</sup> *Et ego quando exaltatus fuero a terra omnia traham ad me ipsum* (John xii. 32).

heard the question : " What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul ?" <sup>1</sup> Words such as these will raise the heedful soul to God and fit it for heroic deeds.

St. Augustine, in his " Confessions," <sup>2</sup> admirably describes the power of such Divine words even over a rebellious soul. Having been given to sensuality for twelve years, he said : " I still hesitated to die unto death and to live unto life. . . . ' How long ? how long ?' said a voice from without. ' To-morrow, to-morrow,' suggested the passions. And the voice repeated : ' Why not now ? why not this very hour ?' And these painful struggles went on," continues the son of Monica, " until one day, while lying under a fig-tree lost in thought, I heard a voice more penetrating than ever cry within my soul : ' Take and read.' <sup>3</sup> And I took the Epistles of St. Paul that I had at hand, and my eyes fell on these words : ' *Let us walk honestly as in the day : not in rioting and in drunkenness, not in contention and envy ; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.*' <sup>4</sup> I would read no further, nor was there need, for at these words a light of confidence and security streamed into my heart ; all the darkness of my former hesitation was dispelled."

But we shall not dwell on this extraordinary action of grace on some specially chosen souls. The word of God within us usually acts gently, progressively ;

<sup>1</sup> *Quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur ?* (Matt. xvi. 26).

<sup>2</sup> " Confessions," Bk. VIII., ch. xii.

<sup>3</sup> *Tolle, lege.*

<sup>4</sup> Rom. xiii. 13, 14.

indeed, oftener than not we have no very distinct perception of it. Yet it does not penetrate the soul the less deeply, and you may have experienced that, whenever you were uplifted by its impulse, there was at once more light and more strength within you, and your heart soared heavenwards, whilst your work found you more ready and more assiduous. "Let Thy good Spirit sink into my soul," prayed St. Ambrose, "let it permeate it silently, let it, without noise of words, teach me all truth."<sup>1</sup>

The object of this Conference is to teach you, my dear friends, *how* you are to nourish your souls with the word of God. There are, alas! too few who appreciate it rightly. Many make it the subject of a purely mental exercise, whereas it ought to be food for interior Prayer—Prayer to which the entire soul applies itself with vigour, whilst at the same time it gives itself up with childlike devotion to intimate, friendly intercourse with our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him with God our Father.

We shall draw your attention first to the *Sterility* of purely mental meditation, and, secondly, to the *Fruitfulness* of Prayer in the form of intimate intercourse of the soul with Christ Jesus, Son of the living God.

<sup>1</sup> *Intret spiritus tuus bonus in cor meum, qui sonet ibi sine sono et sine strepitu verborum loquatur mihi omnem veritatem.*

## I

## PURELY MENTAL MEDITATION

Our daily meditation is often represented as an exercise occupying a certain time set apart for it in our time-table, and as consisting in an intense concentration of *thought* upon some one religious subject, with the purpose of forming and proposing to the will one or more resolutions of amendment or of progress. I do not maintain that this is the definition of it adhered to by contemporary authorities on the spiritual life, but I do not think I am wrong in concluding, from a sufficiently long experience, that such is the notion conceived of it by many pious souls, not only in the world, but in the cloister and in the priesthood.

Meditation is, for them, an exercise in which the *mind* alone is absorbed in a sustained effort of *reflection*. Of course, they do not intend to limit their meditation to a mere act of the intellect; they intend it to stir up their will—so much so that they look upon the meditation as fruitless if they do not end it by formulating expressly, as the logical conclusion drawn from clearly stated premisses, one or more firm resolutions towards bettering their lives. Nevertheless, the headwork in this case is considered the principal part. The cognitive faculties are the first to enter into operation by putting the soul in the presence of God, and by giving it, in the form of “preludes,” the necessary foundation



to work upon. Starting thence, it is they that play the most active part all through the meditation. Certain well-known comparisons go far towards rooting in the minds of men this idea of meditation as a thing chiefly, if not exclusively, intellectual. Is it not quite usual to say to people who complain of inability to meditate: "Why, everyone meditates. An architect prepares his plans, a business man calculates his expenses and his profits, a barrister studies his brief, a politician prepares his speech—in doing so all these men meditate. What is to prevent us from applying to a religious subject the attention we give so willingly and so successfully to worldly matters?" But a comparison may be more or less good, and yet fail to show in its proper light the subject to which it refers. The consequence in this case is that many people form a wrong idea of meditation, taking it to be a strenuous application of the mind to the interests of our moral life. Just as the examination of a case or a plan, or some question of business or politics, occupies in a man's day a certain time, after which he turns his thoughts into quite a different channel, in the same way many people are willing enough to set aside a fixed time daily for meditation, but think little or not at all of linking it on to the various actions that go to make up their day.

Now Prayer is not a solely intellectual act, but a colloquy with our living God. Two persons are necessarily engaged in it, and as there is no hour fixed in an exclusive manner for His service, *Prayer*



must, strictly speaking, be continual. If a certain time in the day is specially reserved for it, it is only in order that its influence may be the better insured over all the acts that are to follow, and of which it must be the vivifying principle.

Being a conversation with God, Prayer consists still more in listening to God than in speaking to Him. When He who is infinite condescends to the level of us His creatures, and invites us to converse with Him, does not propriety itself require that we should turn towards Him, watching for the moment when it will please Him to drop into our souls one of His thrice-blessed words, determined to welcome it with gratitude and respect, and to absorb it into our hearts, that we may live upon it ?

So, then, the chief object of Prayer will not be to ponder on some abstract truth with a view to our moral benefit ; its principal object must be our living God Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ—His person, His teaching, His example, His works. Even were we not conscious of the will to amend or to advance in perfection, this intercourse with our Creator and Redeemer would purify us, would sanctify us ; for the attractions of the Heart of God are a most powerful stimulus to spiritual effort, and are at the same time a most efficacious motive for the manly resolves of a generous soul.

Needless to say, our cognitive faculties will be brought into play, for God would not have us offer Him a blind and unconsidered worship ; but the beneficent advances of the friendship of God will

attract our attention from the outset, alluring us into communication with Him; and this feeling of the love that God bears to us and of the love we owe to Him will be the constant mainstay of docile and unstinted attention to His words.

Rising from prayer of this character, the soul is always filled with a livelier desire to love God more and more, and to love with Him and for His sake the creatures whom He loves.

Most likely, it will not formulate each time a positive resolution to correct such or such a defect which constitutes a hindrance to its spiritual progress, nor even to practise better any virtue in particular; but for all that, it will each time be filled with a more decided disposition to make progress in charity, and this in turn will be, as a direct and necessary consequence, a fruitful source of activity and moral advancement.

Assuredly, my dear friends, I do not dream of questioning the necessity of watching over one's conscience, nor the usefulness of putting this self-control into practice, if need be, during Prayer; but you would do well to remark that if the examination of conscience has an obligatory part to play in our moral life (a subject which I mean to develop in a subsequent Conference), yet it must not be identified with Prayer, neither must you see in it an essential and practically indispensable element of all Prayer. The examination of conscience bears directly on self, and leads towards God only as a consequence, whereas the very *raison d'être* and

immediate effect of truly interior Prayer is to raise the soul out of itself, to make it forget its own separate interests, even moral, fixing it solely in God, in our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is good, who alone is holy, who alone is Lord, who alone is the Most High, and dwells with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God the Father.<sup>1</sup>

Between meditation (in the lower acceptation of the word, such as we have described it) and Prayer properly so called, the difference is considerable. It can be best appreciated by comparing their respective results.

The aim of him who confines himself to mere meditation is, above all other things, the amendment of his life and the extirpation of his defects, so as to acquire more strength and energy for action.

The man of Prayer is not ignorant nor mistaken about the value of action, but he places above it the superior interests of the glory of God, the extension of His kingdom and the most perfect accomplishment of His holy will.

He who lowers Prayer to the level of a practical moral exercise is like Martha, who busied herself about many outward things in the service of our Blessed Lord. The man of true interior Prayer resembles Mary. Full of docility, he sits like her at the feet of Jesus, watching His every look, listening to His slightest word, gathering all into his inmost soul with jealous care. Following the

<sup>1</sup> *Tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria Dei Patris.*



example of our Blessed Lady, he treasures up in the depths of his heart every word that falls from the Divine lips, to ponder over each one of them as food for his soul. "And His Mother kept all these words in her heart."<sup>1</sup> To a certain extent everyone ought to practise this prayer of the heart, because to all men it has been said that they must seek above all things the kingdom of God and His justice. It was not to a chosen few, but to all Christians without distinction, that Our Lord said, in reply to the request of His Apostles: "When you pray, say: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." But not until after this are we to say: "Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The narrow idea many priests conceive of their intercourse with God, has for themselves and their flocks the most deplorable consequences. Deplorable for themselves: for to set oneself day after day, either in meditation or in examination of conscience, face to face with one's own moral miseries is so irksome, so depressing, so fruitless a task! It is so very discouraging for the soul to have to witness its utter powerlessness to get rid of these miseries by solitary efforts perpetually renewed.

This accounts for the sad story of many a priest.

<sup>1</sup> *Et mater ejus conservabat omnia verba hæc in corde suo* (Luke ii. 51).

While at the Seminary he makes his meditation as part of the College discipline, the example of others helping him, together with the control of those in authority. The habit once acquired, he keeps to it for a while by the mere force of custom, and during a period—longer or shorter, as the case may be—he begins his day punctually by making his meditation as of old. This meditation has perhaps no very great influence on the actions that follow, and sometimes at midday he might find it difficult to say on what subject he had meditated in the morning. But, after all, he does not see why that should trouble him. He has been faithful to his day's programme ; his conscience is in peace, and at night, when he goes to rest, it is with a tranquil mind.

But little by little this mechanical exercise begins to lie heavily on him. The meditation is gone through, but he has no longer any taste for it, neither does it produce in him any visible fruit. On the other hand, works of charity have increased in the parish, calls for the ministry of the priest become pressing and absorb more and more of his time and his attention. The time is not far off when the daily meditation, at first curtailed, then sometimes omitted, will end by being completely abandoned. In the case of a man who is employed in teaching or who leads a life of study, thoughts foreign to Divine things take possession of his mind more easily and, as a rule, more rapidly and more completely. The yearly retreat, it is true, will come in due time ; it will make him feel the necessity

---

of a return to his former piety, and this feeling will awaken within him the desire to resume his daily meditation. But if the long education of the Seminary was not enough to make the habit of Prayer take root in his soul, will the accidental stimulus of one week of spiritual exercises have a more lasting effect? A fresh effort will, of course, be made after the retreat, but how long will it last? I have known many pious priests, full of zeal in spiritual matters when leaving the Seminary, who, having several times resumed their practice of daily meditation, ended by giving it up altogether, or nearly so. They may still open from time to time, perhaps even pretty often, some book of Meditations for every day in the year, such as Bronchain, Hamon, Chaignon, Vercruysse, or others; but this pious exercise is rather a *spiritual reading* of the thoughts of another than a serious effort of their own to commune with God. Of course, spiritual reading, just like examination of conscience, has its hour marked in the time-table of the pious. Both are indispensable, but spiritual reading is not *Prayer* any more than examination of conscience is.

Who can tell the harm done to the soul of a priest by the absence of this interior Prayer? What are the sublimest things of religion, the functions of the ministry, the Sacraments, the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass itself, seen from the outside, but outward signs that in no way differ from the profane and everyday things that make up the

ordinary life of each one of us? If you are not careful to stimulate your faith and your love so as to be able to pierce the shadow of the symbol and reach the supernatural reality it signifies, you will come ere long to treat the holiest things with as little regard as if they were the ordinary affairs of everyday life. I do not doubt but that you will still maintain in the exercise of your functions the outward decorum that every professional man observes in performing the duties of his calling. A good man you may remain, but you will no longer be the supernatural man that the priest of Jesus Christ is called to be.

“Sight, touch, and taste in thee are all deceived;  
The ear alone can safely be believed.”<sup>1</sup>

Even the works for which you have sacrificed your Prayer will inevitably suffer thereby sooner or later. How could it be otherwise? Man does not act without a motive power. The will is the faculty of love; and *good* alone inspires love. Where there is no good there is no love, and without love the will does not act.

In dedicating his existence to the service of God and of souls, the priest excludes from the list of motives inciting him to action the good things of this world, the acquisition of which determines the activity of other men. A father, for instance, will be urged to work by solicitude for his children; a merchant will be spurred on by ambition for the

<sup>1</sup> *Visus, tactus, gustus, in te fallitur, sed auditu solo tuto creditur.*



extension of his business ; a political man will spend himself in efforts for the triumph of his party. Now, the priest is deprived of those natural motives of action, which of his own choice he has cast from him, and if he lacks also the supernatural force whose impulse he does not feel because of his own negligence, his situation is pitiful indeed. His soul is like a ship embedded so firmly in a sandbank that no current can lift it off. From the source of supernatural life flows in abundance a living water infinitely richer in nutritive principles and infinitely more fertilizing than the chance refreshment of our natural activity, but we can imbibe it only on condition that we take the trouble to draw it. Without it the soul loses strength, and may some day die of inanition. The priest who does not drink deeply at this source of life will lose at length all interest in the souls confided to his charge, leaving them in the sad condition of sheep without a shepherd.

In our days Catholic society suffers from a want over which noble souls constantly mourn. "There is no lack of confessors," they say, "to absolve us from our sins, but it is very difficult to find directors who can show us the road to God, who can urge us on and sustain us on the path to sanctity." No wonder ! One cannot give what one does not possess. How can it be the constant aim of a confessor to draw souls nearer and nearer to God, to make them live a life of ever-increasing union with Him, if he himself has become a stranger to the secrets of the spiritual life ? His whole ministry

is devoted to action ; he thinks of nothing else ; how, then, can he be expected to develop in others the spirit of Prayer ?

A consequence of this is that the true sense of religion is almost lost. Many a zealous priest is tempted to regret the time he is obliged to devote to the recitation of his Office ; it is so much time lost for good works, in which he believes he could spend it more usefully. He says his Office, it is true, but could he lay his hand on his heart and declare that he makes a prayer of it ?

Again, how many priests are indefatigable in their attention to the sick, to their schools, to their organizations for the working-classes, yet never think of telling their parishioners that on Sunday, at the High Mass, they ought to unite with him in offering the Sacred Victim, so that for a moment at least the entire parish may be raised in spirit above the things that pass, singing together the praises of God. " We praise Thee ; we bless Thee ; we adore Thee ; we glorify Thee ; we give Thee thanks for Thy great glory."

What need is there to add that, to such persons in such environment, the state of life to which our Divine Saviour gave the preference, the vocation of Mary, seems barely excusable ? Need we wonder when we hear Catholics, and sometimes even priests, regret the entrance of some choice souls into the Contemplative Orders ? And yet, good heavens ! what would the world come to but for the lives and the example of those noble souls ?

No, Prayer is not merely a mental exercise confined to some fixed portion of the day ; it is not an effort of the mind bearing on some abstract subject of morals or religion ; it is in its essence an intimate heart-to-heart intercourse, a permanent correspondence kept up between the soul and the living Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him and with Him a lifting up of the whole soul to God.

Let us develop this thought ; let us see (1) what is the aim of Prayer, (2) how we are to practise it, (3) what its subject is to be, and (4) from what motives we ought to be faithful to it.

## II

### PRAYER A HEART-TO-HEART INTERCOURSE WITH GOD

1. The *aim* of Prayer is to fix the soul in a state of union with God.

Prayer winds in and out through the manifold actions, moral and otherwise, that are for ever springing up in our field of life ; it gathers them together in sheaves, and bears them into the granaries of the Divine Reaper. Like the tendrils of the vine, it entwines itself around and amidst them ; it pervades the whole soul, and through all varieties of action it makes itself constantly felt, ever letting in new floods of light and love.

I once had occasion to question the Prior of the Grande Chartreuse on the number of hours spent daily by his monks in mental prayer, and I was

surprised to learn from him that the Rule of St. Bruno allots no fixed time for it as a distinct exercise. Neither does the Rule of St. Benedict. The reason is that the early masters of the contemplative life conceived that all the actions of a monk were to be done in union with God. While chanting the canonical hours, while devoting themselves to study or to manual labour, while eating or drinking, or fulfilling any other duty, no matter what, one thing they were supposed to be doing *always*: striving to love God, and their neighbour for God's sake.

Such is the true interior life of the Christian, and in that life the function of Prayer is to fan the flame of Divine charity in the soul.

It would appear that before the close of the Middle Ages the masters of the spiritual life did not deem it needful to appoint a fixed hour each day for meditation. At the present day, however, this custom is not only advisable, it is absolutely necessary. Such is the hurry and bustle of modern life, such the multiplicity of interests and of social obligations, that it has become almost impossible for men to live a life of union with God unless they reserve one tranquil hour for Him in the early morning, before the whirlwind of their occupations carries them off, covering their souls with its blinding dust and deafening them with its noise.

Let us not forget, however, that, according to the Apostle St. Paul, our souls ought to be always engaged in prayer. "Pray without ceasing," he says.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sine intermissione orate* (1 Thess. v. 17).



Such is the wish expressed by our Divine Saviour. "And He spoke also a parable to them that we ought always to pray and not to faint."<sup>1</sup> "I will bless the Lord at all times ; His praise shall be always in my mouth."<sup>2</sup>

Prayer, rightly understood, prepares the soul for action, sustains her on life's road when weary and worn, and arms her for the fight when the foe assails her. On the other hand, work undertaken for God's sake and accomplished in union with Him, keeps the soul constantly so close to her Creator that her thoughts turn towards Him without an effort. How beautiful is the unity of such a life ! "Who will give me the wings of a dove, and I will fly and take my rest ?"<sup>3</sup>

Experience shows how difficult it is for people whose minds are taken up with study or with manifold cares to keep their souls in this permanent atmosphere of prayer. Still, is it not their own fault ? Towards the close of his life St. Francis of Sales, worn out with work and ill-health, often found it impossible to get one hour of leisure to spend alone with his Divine Master. Nevertheless he wrote to St. Chantal : "Make your mind easy about me ; I have not an hour to myself for mental Prayer, but I do what comes to the same." For, she adds, "he kept his heart ever

<sup>1</sup> *Oportet semper orare et non deficere* (Luke xviii. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore, semper laus ejus in ore meo* (Ps. xxxiii. 2).

<sup>3</sup> *Quis dabit mihi pennas sicut columbæ, et volabo, et requiescam* (Ps. liv. 7).

united to God, doing all his actions through pure love of Him."<sup>1</sup> Our regret that we are unable to tell God sufficiently how we love Him is in itself a proof of our love.

The Blessed Curé d'Ars used to spend long hours both day and night in the confessional, but to the mind of this holy man each penitent recalled the Sacrifice of Calvary and the love of Him who redeemed us. Who amongst us would dare to compare his labours to those of the Bishop of Geneva or the saintly Curé d'Ars? If they could go through such heavy toil without losing sight of God, cannot we keep close to Him while fulfilling our daily duties? For it is not so much our work in itself that interrupts our Prayer as a defective way both of understanding and of going about it.

Such being the *aim* of true interior Prayer, let us see how we are *to practise it*.

2. It must be an exercise into which the whole soul enters, one in which the soul is both inspired and upheld by the dominant feeling that *God loves us*: Prayer is essentially a heart-to-heart conversation with God—affectionate, confidential, reciprocal; an exchange of mutual promises and hopes between the soul and the Son of the Living God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him with the Eternal Father Himself.

As a matter of fact, study often dries up the soul. I have known professors of Theology and of Scripture

<sup>1</sup> "Evidence of St. Jane Frances de Chantal for the Canonization of St. Francis of Sales," Article XXXIII.

who unfortunately broke away from the life of Prayer. Accustomed to ponder on the teachings of the Church and on the Word of God, they carried only their intellectualism into what ought to have been their Prayer, and then, alas ! their study was no longer a preparation for Prayer, but an overgrowth that stifled it. These cases have left a deep and painful impression on my mind, and having been for many years spiritual director to young men, who, on beginning their University career, were full of zeal and piety, I have had frequent opportunities of putting to the proof the danger I here point out. It happens to many that, according as the passion for study rises up in their souls like a flood, the tide of their piety steadily ebbs away. It is not that science turns one away from God, but that in these cases it is not kept in sufficiently close contact with His love, their morning meditation being a mere intellectual exercise, and not a work of their entire soul.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Need we wonder, then, when we see members of the clergy fall from the heights where God has placed them ? As an organ or a limb of the body that lies inert withers away, so faith that is allowed to sleep grows weaker and weaker, till at last it is no more. A French apostate priest, de Meissan by name, expressed his regret that so few of his fellow-labourers followed him out of the Fold ; and the reason he gave for their perseverance was their fidelity to the habits of piety contracted in the Seminary. Does not this confirm the truth of what we say—viz., that the gradual decline of piety is the source of all desertions ? Consequently, if you wish to make sure of your fidelity to God and the Church, give yourselves heart and soul to Prayer.

Our first act in Prayer must be an act of love. Love is the prime mover of the Universe, as Dante tells us in his "Paradiso."<sup>1</sup> And in truth that which is deepest in the nature of every being is precisely its inclination towards the absolute good. The law that governs its action, whether it be carried out unconsciously or obeyed in full knowledge, is the impression of the one Primary Love—that of God.

"God hath first loved us," says St. John: "*Ipse prior dilexit nos.*" Now, love calls for love. God hath first loved us. Before we appeared upon the scene of life or were capable of performing any action, good or bad, God had brooded over us in His Divine thoughts, and when He called us into existence He gave us with life a capacity for happiness. Then He sent unto us His own Son, that we might have a share in His Divine life. Now, "In this is charity," cries St. John, "not as though we had loved God, but because He hath first loved us, and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins."<sup>2</sup>

After that, what remains for us to do if not to love one another? "My dearest," says St. John,

<sup>1</sup> "By the love impelled  
That moves the sun in heaven and all the stars."

DANTE: "Paradiso," Canto xxxiii.

<sup>2</sup> *In hoc apparuit Caritas Dei in nobis, quoniam Filium suum unigenitum misit Deus in mundum, ut vivamus per eum. In hoc est caritas non quasi nos dilexerimus Deum, sed quoniam ipse prior dilexit nos, et misit Filium suum propitiationem pro peccatis nostris* (1 John iv. 9, 10).



“ if God hath so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”<sup>1</sup>

Yes, the one fact that stands out in history, the one light that brightens and warms the moral world, is the love that God has vouchsafed to give to us, His creatures, and to confirm by so many wonderful proofs. The one law that flows therefrom is the blessed obligation to love God in return, and through love for Him to love those who are dear to Him, our brethren in Jesus Christ.

To hold communion with God, to converse intimately with Him, is merely to hear Him tell us over and over again the tale of His love, while we do our little best to tell Him of the love we bear to Him, striving ever to love Him more and more.

Herein we see the meaning of the prelude to prayer that for many has become a mere form : “ Let us place ourselves in the presence of God.” God is not here the Supreme Being who contemplates us from the height of His awful throne, and before whom we can but tremble ; no, we must see in Him before all else our Lord Jesus Christ become man for our sake, He who dwelt amongst us, who dwells amongst us still, and even in us, that we may know and feel the infinite and eternal love that God bears to us. To begin prayer by putting ourselves in the presence of God is to call to mind the fact that, when our Divine Saviour taught His Apostles to pray, He dwelt specially on the Fatherhood of God

<sup>1</sup> *Carissimi, si sic Deus dilexit nos, et nos debemus alterutrum diligere* (1 John iv. 11).



## No Cardinal Mercier's Conferences

in His very first words : " When you pray say : Our Father." O God, Thou art *a Father* to us. Thou hast authority over us, but Thou hast also all the love of the kindest of fathers for his children. And Thou art *our* Father, the Father of us all, for there is no single one of us whom Thou lovest not ; neither should there be one that we love not, if we obey Thy teaching and follow Thy example.

It is easy to see what will be the effect of prayer begun in this spirit, and what influence it will have not only over the meditation itself, but all through the day over those actions by which we shall be brought into communication with our neighbour. The practice of charity will thus bring into play the affective powers of the soul, and the latter, by a process already explained in a former Conference,<sup>1</sup> will sustain the attention of the cognitive powers in the perception of their object.

In this way will the mind lend an attentive ear to the Word of God, letting it sink into its depths, so that by its beneficent action it may stimulate and determine the will. This is the moment to recall the words of the holy Abbot of Clairvaux : " Let thy thoughts dwell on Him who thinks of thee ; listen to Him who speaks to thee, that He may listen to thee when thou speakest to Him."<sup>2</sup>

Then in your turn you will speak to God. Almighty God claims an active co-operation from every soul

<sup>1</sup> Fourth Conference, " The Voice of God," p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Intende ergo illi qui intendit tibi ; audi illum loquentem tibi ut ipse exaudiat te loquentem sibi.*

which He vouchsafes to guide, in whatsoever path He chooses to lead it, and the more abundant the manifestations of Divine love, the more intense and continuous should be the co-operation of man.

In order to assimilate the spiritual food contained in the Word of God, an application of our senses, our imagination and our intellect, to the object presented to them is, as a rule, indispensable. This consists in a work of analysis, comparison, and deduction from the facts of faith—a task which our reason must accomplish with persevering courage, convinced that the faintest spark that springs from our own personal effort will bring more light and, above all, more fervour into the soul than would the strongest impetus supplied by any extraneous force.

An idea must be our own if it is to have an effective influence on our will, and prepare it to form high resolutions. Now, it can be ours only on condition of its being, if not discovered, at least recognized by us and made our own by a personal effort of assimilation. In the same way memories of the past or forecasts of the future can move us in Prayer in so far only as they are *our* memories and *our* forecasts. In a word, the heart and the will can be influenced only by a thought that has become in some sort a part of ourselves.

When we are careful to maintain this element of personal reflection, the meditation, founded from the outset on an act of love, quickens within us our power of loving, and evokes within us fresh feelings of fear, regret, admiration, desire, hope, and charity. Our

will thereby becomes firmer ; resolutions take shape and gain strength, and frequently it happens that, without having for a moment intended to make a resolution against any particular fault or defect, the whole soul finds itself ready for the fight. Its hatred of sin has increased, and its determination to go from good to better has taken deeper root. Needless to say, this whole series of operations—attention to the object of our love, the affections and resolutions that this contemplation arouses in the heart and in the will—can and ought to be renewed. It is the very repetition of them that constitutes Prayer.

3. As to the *Object* of Prayer, it is none other than the living God, who vouchsafes to grant us an audience, and who invites us to converse intimately with Him. Let us love to excite our souls to joyful adoration of our God, singing in our hearts along with the Church : “ Come, let us praise the Lord with joy ; let us joyfully sing to God our Saviour.”<sup>1</sup> Yes, “ let us adore and fall down : and weep before the Lord that made us. For He is the Lord our God : and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand.” It is the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, to whose teachings we will listen and whose example we will contemplate with docile piety.

We shall call to mind some words of our Divine Saviour—one of His parables, an article of the Creed,

<sup>1</sup> *Venite exultemus Domino jubilemus Deo salutare nostro. . . . Venite adoremus et procidamus ante Deum : ploremus coram Domino, qui fecit nos, quia ipse est Dominus Deus noster, nos autem populus ejus et oves pascuæ ejus* (Ps. xciv.).



some dogma of the Church, some extract from the Liturgy, one or other of the sacred hymns of the Breviary, or the Gospel in action as it is seen in the life of one of God's saints.

But above all, and as often as possible, let us take as the subject of our prayer Jesus Christ Himself — the God - Man in His crib, at the carpenter's bench, on the hill-sides preaching to the multitude, in the Garden of Gethsemane, on the cross, in the sepulchre, in the Holy Eucharist, in the glory of His triumph. Jesus Christ will lead us to the invisible God ; to the contemplation of His perfections and of His wonderful works ; to a more intimate and more loving knowledge of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Is not this the path the Church points out to us when she sings in the Preface to the Christmas Mass : “ Because by the mystery of the Word made flesh the new light of Thy brightness hath shone upon the eyes of our minds, that, while we behold God visibly, we may by Him be carried on to the love of things invisible ”? <sup>1</sup>

I am not ignorant of the fact that we all offend God, and that even he who is the immediate representative of Christ amongst us, our Supreme Pontiff, may not mount the altar-steps without striking his breast acknowledging himself guilty of sin : “ *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.* ” How much the more, then, must we grieve for our sins, and say

<sup>1</sup> *Quia per incarnati Verbi mysterium, nova mentis nostræ oculis lux tuæ claritatis infulsit : ut dum visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilem amorem rapiamur.*

with conviction : " Our Father who art in heaven, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us " ! Yes, that I know ; nevertheless, we are not in this vale of tears for sorrow only. Our chief object here is to love our Lord Jesus Christ, to love Him, and through Him to reach His Eternal Father. Let us cry out, then, to God, and tell Him of our misery and our sorrow ; let us implore His Divine mercy. "*Christe, Fili Dei vivi, miserere nobis ; Christe, Fili Dei vivi, miserere nobis.*" And, again : "*Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.*" Then let us lend a most attentive ear to what He may have to say to us ; let us watch for His light ; let us in all docility allow His living, penetrating word to sink deeply into our hearts. Like a two-edged sword it will detach our baptized souls from lower impulses, and will show us in the light of conscience what God requires of us and what faults we must correct in order to become less unworthy of His love. After all, the one chief means of breaking away from evil is to love good. The more filial our love for the Model of all sanctity, and the greater our admiration for Him, the more distress shall we experience from the contrast between the hideousness of our faults and the inexpressible beauty of God.

Thus, indirectly yet most efficaciously, will Prayer contribute to the amendment of our lives and the correction of our faults. Prayer is, and must remain, an essentially friendly conversation with Jesus, for " He alone is found good and faithful above

all friends.”<sup>1</sup> It must be an intercourse of the soul with God, a pious colloquy between the Father and His child, bearing much more upon the interests of Him to whom we owe everything and before whom we are as nothing, than on the manifold trifles of which our own little lives are composed. The description we have hitherto given of Prayer corresponds, we believe accurately, with the definition which St. Theresa gives of it. “Prayer,” she says, “is nothing else than an intimate friendship, a frequent, affectionate, heart-to-heart intercourse, with Him by whom we know ourselves to be loved.”<sup>2</sup>

To know that we are loved is the fundamental condition, the necessary starting-point, the very soul of Prayer. This feeling—that in drawing nigh to God we approach a Father who loves us—opens the heart to the effusions of affection, to intimate confidences, and elicits from it numberless acts of love.

This feeling of the Divine friendship is like a reservoir of supernatural grace in the depths of our souls; from it rise up, according to our needs, springs of contrition, hope, strength, and ardent charity.

Did you ever witness one of the most glorious sights of nature, the melting of a glacier? When the summer sun clothes in its rays the summits of the Alps, and snow and ice begin to thaw, countless rills of silvery water flow along the mountain-side,

<sup>1</sup> “Imitation of Christ,” Bk. II., ch. viii.

<sup>2</sup> “Œuvres Complètes de Ste. Thérèse,” i. 120. Retaux, Paris, 1907.

running into one another and meeting in the valley below.

Of these waters part flows off along the surface of the earth, now filtering quietly through thin layers of sand, now rushing tumultuously down rocky abysses and ravines. Increasing in volume with every fresh stream that joins them, they form the rivers, great and small, that the mighty ocean is ever calling to its bosom. Another part of those melting snows spreads abroad through the valley, and, after fertilizing it, sinks into the earth until it rests on an impermeable stratum. Here is the inexhaustible reservoir that supplies our springs, and as soon as some fortunate accident or some clever feat of industrial effort liberates those hidden waters, up they spring from their depths, cold, limpid, and fertilizing.

Such is Prayer. According as it draws us nearer to the source of Divine love, the hardness of our indifference is softened, the ice of our hearts dissolves and the powers of our souls, bathed in the waters of Divine grace, are borne by them aloft—sometimes in unruffled calm, sometimes in a storm of temptation or anguish—towards Him who, like the ocean, is the attracting force and final term of all the activity of creatures.

At the same time, perhaps even unknown to ourselves, a deposit of vivifying water forms, drop by drop, in the depths of our souls, as a reserve for the rough journey of life ; and when, faint and thirsty, we are sinking under the heat and burden of the day,



one sigh towards God, or one gentle touch of the Divine hand, will be enough to make those waters of comfort rise and flood our weary souls, refreshing us and giving us new strength to continue our appointed pilgrimage.)

“ O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day. For Thee my soul hath thirsted ; for Thee my flesh, oh, how many ways ! In a desert land, and where there is no way and no water ; so in the sanctuary have I come before Thee to see Thy power and Thy glory.”<sup>1</sup>

4. My dear friends, if Prayer is what I have just explained to you, what need is there to encourage you to remain faithful to its daily practice ? Is there any doubt but that we should love God ? Well, Prayer is the indispensable means of fostering that love within our souls.

St. Theresa does not hesitate to declare that he who does not meditate has no need of the devil to drag him to hell : he goes down of his own accord. Again, does not the inspired author of the Psalms say : “ Unless Thy law had been my meditation I had then perhaps perished in my abjection ” ?<sup>2</sup>

What an amount of vital force is lost in the world amongst the clergy and in religious houses, because the heart is not more given to Prayer ! “ With deso-

<sup>1</sup> *Deus, Deus meus, ad te de luce vigilo. Sitivit in te anima mea, quam multipliciter tibi caro mea, in terra deserta et in via et iniquosa : sic in sancto apparui tibi, ut viderem virtutem tuam et gloriam tuam* (Ps. lxii. 1-3).

<sup>2</sup> *Nisi quod lex tua meditatio mea est, tunc forte periissem in humilitate mea* (Ps. cxviii. 92).

lation is all the land made desolate : because there is none that considereth in the heart.”<sup>1</sup>

I do not wish to dwell upon this gloomy thought ; I prefer urging you to give all the love of your hearts to our Blessed Lord, so that you may be both capable and desirous of winning for Him the love of your fellow-men. This you *cannot* do without Prayer.

The subdeacon finds time to recite his Breviary, the priest to say his Mass. Would you seriously maintain that you can find no leisure for Prayer ?

Since the multiplicity of things that solicit and absorb our attention obliges us to devote to Prayer a fixed time of the day, let us impose on ourselves strict punctuality in the fulfilment of this pious duty.

A holy English Bishop goes so far as to say that a priest who amidst his various occupations cannot find time to make his daily meditation ought to ask his Superior to transfer him to some other post.

But in reality these are mere suppositions. I remarked to you just now that St. Francis of Sales, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, the Blessed Curé d'Ars, and many others, found time for the daily care of their interior life ; and do you fancy that you could not reserve for yourselves one free hour—even half an hour ?

Make, then, your meditation every day, and, if possible, in the early morning hours. “ He will

<sup>1</sup> *Desolatione desolata est omnis terra quia nemo est qui recogitet corde* (Jer. xii. 11).

give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him, and he will pray in the sight of the Most High.”<sup>1</sup>

Draw near to God with full confidence that He will speak to your heart, and declare to Him your willingness to listen to His voice. “I will hear what the Lord God will speak to me.”<sup>2</sup>

He will assuredly speak to you; you have His Divine word for it in His solemn promise made to all Christian souls: “I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete. . . . He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.”<sup>3</sup> Have faith in these words, my dear friends; they contain a promise which concerns you deeply, and which God will not fail to fulfil.

Ever since the dawn of time has the Eternal Wisdom bent down to man. She it was who presided over the formation of the spheres, numbering, measuring, weighing all things. From the beginning she was the standard and guiding light of human judgments, as she was the source of every created good. Therefore, as century follows century, does she address herself to all men when she says: “Blessed

<sup>1</sup> *Cor suum tradet ad vigilandum diluculo ad Dominum, qui fecit illum, et in conspectu Altissimi deprecabitur* (Ecclus. xxxix. 6).

<sup>2</sup> *Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus* (Ps. lxxxiv. 9).

<sup>3</sup> *Rogabo Patrem et alium Paraclitum dabit vobis. . . . Ille vos docebit omnia et suggeret vobis omnia quæcumque dixerò vobis* (John xiv. 16, 26).

is the man that heareth me and that watcheth daily at my gates, and waiteth at the posts of my doors. He that shall find me shall find life, and shall have salvation from the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

It is now our happy lot to possess more than the God of nature to whom our reason rises with difficulty and through the medium of creatures ; for the Word of God has vouchsafed to become one of ourselves. He assumed our flesh and blood ; He took a soul like ours. In everything, sin excepted, He became like unto us. The Apostles saw Him ; they spoke to Him ; they pressed His sacred hands between their rough palms ; they shared His meals, conversing with Him ; they wept and suffered with Him. When they yearned to tell Him of their love, or when in their sorrows they needed comfort, He hesitated not to clasp them to His heart. Yes, my dear friends, the message of God to man reaches its culminating point in these words : " And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us . . . full of grace and truth."<sup>2</sup>

We must look to it that we keep close to the overflowing source of Divine grace. " And of His fulness we have all received, and grace for grace."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Beatus homo qui audit me, et qui vigilat ad fores meas quotidie et observat ad postes ostii mei. Qui me invenerit, inveniet vitam, et hauriet salutem a Domino* (Prov. viii. 34, 35).

<sup>2</sup> *Et verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis . . . plenum gratiæ et veritatis* (John i. 14).

<sup>3</sup> *Et de plenitudine ejus nos omnes accepimus et gratiam pro gratia* (John i. 16).



Let us sit at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ. He invites every one of us to listen to His teachings. "Learn of me"—*Discite a me*—He says to us. Though no longer living visibly in our midst, He is still amongst us. Wherever there is a priest to consecrate the Eucharistic bread, He resides in our tabernacles. Under the sacred species He has left to us the most complete proof of His love. "Having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end."<sup>1</sup> In that living memorial He has concentrated all the marvels of His tenderness and of His mercy. "He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, being a merciful and gracious Lord. He hath given food to them that fear Him."<sup>2</sup>

His Spirit lives within us by sanctifying grace. He gives Him to us for our instruction, for our guidance through life, for our sanctification in His love. The mission of the Holy Spirit is a prolongation of that of the Word, with the special object of elevating towards the Father all docile souls and realizing in this world the union of souls upon the model of the perfect union of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity—until God, One in Three, will one day show Himself to us face to face as He is: All in all things—*Omnia in omnibus*<sup>3</sup>—"that they

<sup>1</sup> *Cum dilexisset suos, qui erant in mundo, in finem dilexit eos* (John xiii. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Memoriam fecit mirabilium suorum misericors et miserator Dominus, escam dedit timentibus se* (Ps. cx. 4).

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 28.

all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me and I in Thee."<sup>1</sup>

In His incomparable discourse to His disciples after the Last Supper, Our Saviour thus sums up all these affectionate words of encouragement : " Let not your heart be troubled. I will not leave you orphans."<sup>2</sup> Another will now be what I have been to you during the few years I have spent in your midst. I have taught you ; He will teach you likewise. I have protected, comforted, helped you ; *Another* will take My place amongst you—He whom I will call down upon you, the Paraclete, whom My Father will give unto you. Through all eternity will He remain with you ; He is the Spirit of Truth. " He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said unto you."<sup>3</sup>

Now, is it credible that followers of Christ, that priests even, can read these lines again and again, believe in them, and yet forget that for each and every one of us there is an interior life that consists in receiving the communications which God the Father makes to us by His Son, whom He sent amongst us ? that there is, under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, a supernatural expansion of life,

<sup>1</sup> *Ut omnes unum sint, sicut tu Pater in me, et ego in te* (John xvii. 21).

<sup>2</sup> *Non turbetur cor vestrum ; non relinquam vos orphanos* (John xiv. 18).

<sup>3</sup> *Paracletus autem, Spiritus sanctus, quem mittet Pater in nomine meo, ille vos docebit omnia, et suggeret vobis omnia quaecumque dixero vobis* (John xiv. 26).

the object of which is the development and the religious practice of what our Lord Jesus Christ came to teach us ? Have you not heard His words ? Christ was, for the Apostles and for a few privileged souls of Judæa and of Galilee who clung to Him, a Paraclete ; but to us, to the Church through all centuries, He has sent *another* Paraclete—*aliūm Paraclitum*—whose mission of light and love it is to guide the Church along her destined path.

We, however, have an essential condition to fulfil. God admits to His service and consents to guide only *men of good will*. We must therefore begin by obeying the behests of our Divine Master. If our strength and courage fail, we must appeal to Him through humble and trustful prayer. We have no excuse, therefore, if we have not the kingdom of God within us ; for, says our Blessed Lord, “ Whatever you shall ask the Father in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”<sup>1</sup> “ If you love me keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of Truth.”<sup>2</sup>

Rid yourselves of the spirit of the world, for it is in nowise disposed to welcome the Spirit of Truth, “ Whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him ; but you shall

<sup>1</sup> *Et quodcumque petieritis Patrem in nomine meo, hoc faciam, ut glorificetur Pater in Filio* (John xiv. 13).

<sup>2</sup> *Si diligitis me, mandata mea servate. Et ego rogabo Patrem, et aliūm Paraclitum dabit vobis, ut maneat vobiscum in æternum ; Spiritum veritatis* (John xiv. 15-17).

know Him because He shall abide in you and shall be in you.”<sup>1</sup>

Would you be blameless any longer if, after having heard so explicit a call from God to practise the interior life in the school of Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you still refused to fulfil the conditions required for this union with God to which your soul is invited ?

Therefore give yourselves up to prayer ; execute with punctuality, with docility, with generosity, everything that God requires of you. Be *of good will*. Do all that is in your power, and as to what is beyond it, ask for God's help, and He will give it. The Council of Trent, quoting from St. Augustine, says : “ God does not require of us what is impossible, but He warns us that we must do what in us lies, while imploring His help for what we cannot do ; and He will help us to accomplish what without Him would be impossible to us.”<sup>2</sup> You will *then* be ready to receive God and to let yourselves be taught all things by Him : “ and they shall all be taught of God.”—*Et erunt omnes docibiles Dei*.<sup>3</sup>

Those words of our Saviour which we have quoted in order to stimulate you to greater confidence in Prayer, are addressed to all Christian

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritum veritatis quem mundus non potest accipere, quia non videt eum nec scit eum ; vos autem cognoscetis eum, quia apud vos manebit et in vobis erit* (John xiv. 17).

<sup>2</sup> *Deus impossibilia non jubet, sed jubendo monet et facere quod possis et petere quod non possis, et adjuvat ut possis* (“ De Justificatione,” Sess. VI., cap. xi.).

<sup>3</sup> John vi. 45.



souls. The following, addressed especially to us members of the priesthood, are more touching still and, if possible, more persuasive : “ You are My friends if you do the things that I command you. I will not now call you servants : for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends : because all things whatsoever I have heard of My Father I have made known to you.”<sup>1</sup> Now, is there in all the Gospel a word more comforting or more encouraging than this ?

I feel sure that your minds are made up to refuse Our Lord nothing that He may require of your good will. This disposition is sufficient. You are His friends ; He has given you His word for it : “ You are My friends if you do the things that I command you.” Now, how is friendship proved ? What is the customary intercourse between two friends ?

The master has his servants : he intimates his orders to them, but in nowise considers himself bound to explain to them the projects which he requires them to execute. The expression of his will must be enough for them ; they may perhaps be neither capable of understanding nor worthy of knowing his reasons. How different is it among friends ! Between these there is no secret. The intercourse of friendship consists chiefly in mutual confidences : the one is not satisfied until the other

<sup>1</sup> *Vos amici mei estis, si feceritis quæ ego præcipio vobis. Jam non dicam vos servos quia servus nescit quid faciat dominus ejus. Vos autem dixi amicos, quia omnia, quæcumque audivi a Patre meo, nota feci vobis* (John xv. 14, 15).

has read even into the depths of his heart ; when not understood he suffers as much as, perhaps more than, when he himself is unable to fathom the soul he loves.

Our Divine Saviour not only proffers to us His friendship, but He invites us even now to taste its sweetness. We are not His servants, but His friends, and as friends He means to treat us, opening to us His Divine Heart, and making known to us all the secrets of His Heavenly Father.

#### CONCLUSION

My dear friends, let us yield up our souls to this Divine intimacy. In the silence of our room, at the foot of the crucifix, before the tabernacle, let us gather such sacred words into our souls ; let us apply them to our own needs ; let us live on them ourselves, and make of them the food wherewith to nourish those souls over whom we may have influence. " Let us take delight in the word of God," says Bossuet, " in the thought and in the wisdom of God. Let us listen to the word spoken to us in a profound and admiring silence ; let us listen with the ear of our heart, saying to Him with Samuel : ' Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.' Let us love prayer and intimate, familiar communication with God. Who, then, imposing silence on himself and on all that is not God, would not let his feelings flow out sweetly towards the Word who became Man and fixed His dwelling in our midst ?

“What virtue would not spring from this intercourse with God and with His Word ! what humility ! what self-renunciation ! what devotedness ! what love for truth ! what cordiality ! what candour !”<sup>1</sup>

May each of our days, may each of our meditations be a step forward in the path of light. If anyone lives in darkness it is because he lacks love for God and for his neighbour. Let us love God with all our heart, with all our strength, and light will shine brighter and brighter within our minds ; our hearts will expand with a deeper feeling of freedom, and the warmth and energy of our zeal will increase. The spirit of charity will breathe through our works ; these being the fruit of Prayer will bear fruit in their turn, and thus our whole lives will be a foretaste of the heavenly life to come. In heaven we shall see God face to face, and the contemplation of His beauty will irradiate our beings with a light of never-failing love. May our faithful love both for God and for those whom God loves draw us nearer and nearer to the happiness of our heavenly home !

O Mary, my beloved Mother, let me bring this Conference to a close by a prayer breathed forth at thy feet. May it, under thy protection, bring forth fruits of salvation and sacerdotal zeal in this beloved diocese which I have placed under thy motherly protection.

From the cross thy Divine Son called to thy

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, “Elevations on the Mysteries,” Elev. VIII., twelfth week.

side that beloved disciple who had deeper insight than the others into the mysteries of the Incarnate Word, no doubt because he had a deeper love for Him on whose sacred breast he had laid his head. Vouchsafe to see in the person of St. John all those priests, all those apostles of the Church who hunger and thirst after the love of God. We are thy sons ; thy Divine Son who, by the shedding of His Precious Blood, acquired full power over thy soul, has entrusted us to thy maternal care. Guard us, O kindest of Mothers, protect thy children. Teach us to know and to love Jesus. Show unto us how He prayed, how He taught, how He suffered, and after this our exile show unto us thy beloved Jesus Himself, the fruit of thy womb, in the glory of heaven.

#### APPENDIX

Some, perhaps, may be inclined to ask whether we condemn the usual methods of meditation and the use of books. We would reply to this question, first, by saying that the practice of the interior life is the union of the soul with God and its progress in His love. He who attains this end by what approved method soever does well to remain faithful to it. There are many paths that lead to the glaciers of the Alps ; provided the summit be reached, it matters little by what route we mount. We believe, moreover, that all ought to begin by using a book, as it will be the means of turning their attention more directly to the sacred mysteries and to the complete cycle of the life of Our Lord.

But the book must be like the scaffolding used



in the building of an edifice ; without it you will scarcely rise ; but by the generous and persevering efforts of your own will and with the help of God, which you must frequently and earnestly implore, it will gradually teach you to meditate unaided on various subjects. When after a time you find food for Prayer in a verse from the Scriptures or the "Imitation of Christ," or in any of the beautiful prayers contained in the Missal, the Ritual, or the Roman Pontifical ; above all, when the crucifix or the tabernacle suffices to raise your soul towards God and unite you to Him ; then, needless to say, the edifice of your interior life no longer requires the scaffolding, and will benefit by its removal. But it will be wise to set it up again for a while if ever there are any repairs to be executed.

As to the ordinary methods of meditation, one must know, study, and practise them ; but it ought to be with them as with the rules of syntax or of the syllogism : one must know them well enough to put them into practice spontaneously—without even thinking of them.

## SIXTH CONFERENCE

### PEACE OF SOUL

*Dominus det nobis suam pacem, et vitam æternam. Amen.*

"May the Lord give unto us His peace and life everlasting. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

When we recall to your minds the loving invitation of our Divine Master to share His friendship—"I will not now call you servants . . . but friends,"<sup>2</sup> "Fear not"<sup>3</sup> . . . "for My yoke is sweet and My burden light"<sup>4</sup>; when you hear the inspired author of the Psalms sing with all his heart, "How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord,"<sup>5</sup> "For better is one day in Thy courts above thousands"<sup>6</sup> spent elsewhere; when he lays before you the testimony of his experience, saying, "O taste

<sup>1</sup> From the Divine Office.

<sup>2</sup> John xv. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Luke xxiv. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xi. 30.

<sup>5</sup> *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum; concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini* (Ps. lxxxiii. 2, 3).

<sup>6</sup> *Melior est enim dies una in atriis tuis, super millia* (Ps. lxxxiii. 11).

and see that the Lord is sweet,"<sup>1</sup> "Think of the Lord in goodness"<sup>2</sup>—when you call to mind all this, are you not inclined to think that you will find nothing but joy in the service of God?

Still, we know only too well that here below we, children of Eve, are exiles, and that this bright world of ours is, after all, but a vale of tears. Our Divine Saviour recognizes that mankind is in sorrow, for when presenting to us His Divine yoke, He says: "Come to Me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you."<sup>3</sup> How needless to say that the greater part of mankind is in search of happiness, but ever bemoaning its failure to find it! Many are even such pessimists that they would have us believe it useless to hope for any happiness whatever here below.

What is the secret of these two conflicting views of life? Can our Blessed Lord have deceived us? Does He not seem to promise us happiness even on this side of the grave, as an earnest of the happiness to come? And if He does not deceive us, what is the key to the mystery? for He is apparently in contradiction with Himself.

The whole truth is that man is not born happy, but has the power to become so. He must fight for happiness, and can attain to it only by victory

<sup>1</sup> *Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus* (Ps. xxxiii. 9).

<sup>2</sup> *Sentite de Domino in bonitate* (Wisdom i. 1).

<sup>3</sup> *Venite ad me, qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego reficiam vos* (Matt. xi. 28).

over his passions. Hence the necessity of an unceasing struggle, with its inevitable train of suffering and sorrow, before the soul can reach that *tranquillitas ordinis* in which consists, according to the beautiful definition of St. Augustine, the reign of interior peace.

Following the lead of our Divine Saviour, we now come to beg of you, dear friends, to face the fight. We shall speak to you, first, of the war your passions have declared against you ; secondly, of the war you must declare against them in order to secure peace and attain to life eternal.

## I

### THE REVOLT OF OUR PASSIONS

It would not be flattering to your common-sense to offer proofs here of the absurdity of those materialistic theories that look upon man as a mere ephemeral combination of elements destined to fall back into the general circulation of matter. There is something within us which will outlive the dissolution of the organism—something, consequently, that is distinct from it, that is not one with it. We are possessed of intellects capable of apprehending objects perceived by the senses, apart from the conditions inherent in all merely sense-representations ; and in thus disengaging itself from the bonds that limit the activity of the organism the thinking soul proves itself superior to the latter. It rises, in fact, above the whole material universe ; not



alone for Pascal's reason, that even were the universe to crush the thinking reed called Man, it would be unconscious of its own victory, while its victim would know that its end had come ; but because this formidable mechanism of the universe, with all its strength, cannot touch the freedom of the human will. Being man, I am a monarch. The busy world rolls round me ; the stars of heaven sweep on silently in their orbits ; our planet spins unceasingly on its axis ; events follow one another in rapid succession ; sometimes peace, sometimes war ; yet of these mighty changes not a stir can reach the depths of my being, to violate the sanctuary of my will. A tyrant's sword may threaten me if I refuse to bend my will to his caprice, but my will, in the majesty of its independence, can rise superior to every threat. Like the children in the fiery furnace, it can call upon all creatures to unite with it in singing the praises of Him whom an impious persecutor would have it deny.

But unfortunately this sovereign lord, who has no master on earth, is badly served by his own subjects. He is surrounded by courtiers who flatter him and live at his expense. The bodyguard, that ought to be on the watch for his safety, is composed of cowards who flee at the first sign of danger and of fools who rush headlong and blindfold into the thick of the fray. Ever hungering after pleasure, his people are all insatiable, all unreliable. His soldiers, when not in open mutiny, are busy in the darkness plotting his ruin.

Let the king seek to come to terms with the rebels and it is the signal for them to summon him to abdicate.

Let him strive to resist and a never-failing wakefulness and a firmness of purpose that knows neither truce nor weakness must be his both night and day.

At this price only can we uphold the sway of our moral sovereignty. In truth, our sense-faculties cling with unreasoning passion to the things that please and flatter them. Intolerant of the rights of rival faculties, they will have their whims carry them beyond the bounds of reason. At every turn some impression, some inclination, some sensuous desire, some impulsive motion of the will itself, encroaches upon freedom, enfeebling its force. And these same faculties recoil instinctively from all that is displeasing to them. Their repugnance to moral obligations, the reluctance with which they are brought to fulfil them, their resistance to the laws of virtue, create around their sovereign an atmosphere of violence and strife. He reigns in a state of siege.

This antagonism between our free-will and the faculties in its service is abnormal. It was not in the Creator's original plan. It was unknown to our first parents before the Fall. With them the body bowed to reason ; reason adhered to the moral order and to God, its mainstay and foundation. But the sin of our first parents, which has passed to their posterity, introduced into human nature the seeds of rebellion, an evil ferment that alienated



the senses from reason, and reason itself from God. Sanctifying grace, the fruit of our redemption wrought by Jesus Christ, removes from this interior disorder its character of guilt, but allows its effects to remain. As the Council of Trent declares, concupiscence remains within us even after Baptism, that it may urge us on to the glorious struggles of the Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore does it follow that, notwithstanding the flood of spiritual life poured into our souls by the Sacraments and by the actual graces which the Divine Goodness showers upon us, it is still our lot to have to struggle, and virtue can be neither acquired nor maintained but at the cost of hard-fought battles.

In Christian parlance, the soul, with its moral aspirations and its disposition to submit to the Divine law, is termed SPIRIT; man, laden with all those sensuous inclinations and impulsive feelings that tend to turn him from his moral ideal and from his submission to God, is termed FLESH. Both these expressions, which are borrowed from theology, correspond pretty exactly to what in everyday speech we call the "Christian soul" and the "passions." Now, between the Christian soul and the passions taken in the worst sense of the word—between the "spirit" and the "flesh"—

<sup>1</sup> *Manere autem in baptizatis concupiscentiam, vel fomitem, hæc sancta Synodus fatetur et sentit: quæ quum ad agonem relictæ sit. . . . Hanc concupiscentiam aliquando Apostolus peccatum appellat . . . quia ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinât* (Conc. Trid., Sess. V., Decr. de pecc. orig.).

there must be waged a war that knows no truce.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The word "flesh," in the language of Christians, does not mean the organized body, endowed with physical life and capable of sensation ; the term has assumed the meaning assigned to it by St. Paul : it means our entire human nature, soul and body, but with the deformity brought upon it by original sin. What we term the "spirit," as opposed to the "flesh," is not exclusively the soul considered with the dispositions inherent in its spiritual nature, but the soul raised to the supernatural order and enriched with the gifts of grace.

The "flesh" does not denote the nature of man considered in its normal state ; for in this state, and as forming the object of abstract definition, human nature does not include the deformities which are the unhappy results of our first parents' sin, and which, in their connection with the latter, it assumes. Neither does the "spirit" denote the spiritual soul considered in its natural condition ; for on the one hand its own nature does not give it any title to grace, while, on the other hand, the spiritual soul is not a mere spirit, but forms with the body which it animates one substantial whole.

In order to understand the opposition between the "flesh" and the "spirit" in apostolical literature and in Church phraseology one must consider it from the supernatural point of view, the only one, indeed, that has an historical reality. Man, considered in the state to which original sin has reduced him, is placed in opposition with man renovated by his elevation to the supernatural life ; the "old" man is contrasted with the "new." The *old man*, the *flesh*, *flesh and blood*, the *soul*, *nature* in the concrete acceptance of the word, soiled by the original stain until cleansed by grace, or at the very least with those results of original sin that Baptism allows to persist—all these are synonymous terms. So also are the terms the new man, the spirit, the interior man, and often even the word grace, equivalent to one another in the vocabulary of Christian asceticism,



The vicissitudes of this daily warfare mark the stages of every Christian's life. The fight begins the moment the baptized soul becomes conscious of its responsibilities, and ends only at death. Heaven is for those only who have fought the good fight to the end. "For he also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned unless he strive lawfully."<sup>1</sup> "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation," saith St. James, "for when he hath been proved he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to those that love Him."<sup>2</sup>

Let us recall to mind, my dear friends, the prayer which Holy Church places upon our lips at the end of each part of our Canonical Office: "May the Lord give unto us His peace and life everlasting. Amen."<sup>3</sup> Consummate peace and life eternal are inseparably united. Well they knew it, those fervent Christians of the first three centuries, who engraved with jealous care on the tombstones of their beloved dead the dove bearing an olive-branch. Their favourite salutation was: "*In pace*," "*Vivas in pace*" (Peace be unto thee, Mayest thou live in peace!). In our own days, have we a better wish to express for the dear ones gone before us than this simple hope: "May they rest in peace!" (*Requiescant in pace*!)?

So, until the time comes when the Prince of

<sup>1</sup> *Qui certat in agone non coronatur nisi legitime certaverit* (2 Tim. ii. 5).

<sup>2</sup> *Beatus vir qui suffert tentationem, quoniam cum probatus fuerit, accipiet coronam vitæ, quam repromisit Deus diligentibus se* (Jac. i. 12).

<sup>3</sup> *Dominus det nobis suam pacem, et vitam æternam. Amen.*

Peace will inaugurate for us the era of eternal rest, it is our duty to watch with weapons ever in readiness, always resolved to repulse every assault of the enemy of our salvation, ever on our guard against the snares which he sets along our path.

St. Paul, who well knew his interior enemy, has described its doings in almost tragic terms : " For that which I work I understand not ; for I do not that good which I will, but the evil which I hate, that I do. If, then, I do that which I will not, I consent to the law, that it is good. Now, then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that there dwelleth not in me—that is to say, in my flesh—that which is good. For to will is present with me, but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not ; but the evil which I will not, that I do. Now, if I do that which I will not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find, then, a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man : but I see another law in my members fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? The grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Quod enim operor non intelligo : non enim quod volo bonum, hoc ago ; sed quod odi malum, illud facio. Si autem quod nolo, illud facio, consentio legi, quoniam bona est. Nunc autem jam non ego operor illud ; sed quod habitat in me peccatum. Scio enim quia non habitat in me, hoc est in*

Many and diverse though they may be, the inordinate tendencies of "the flesh" are always in reality one or other of the three lusts mentioned by St. John in his First Epistle: "For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life."<sup>1</sup>

All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh—that is, the pursuit of sensual or voluptuous pleasures; the concupiscence of the eyes—that is, the craving after external delights; the pride of life—that is, the evil passion of pride. These three roots of all the vices that tarnish the moral purity of the soul are nourished by the same sap—*selfishness*.

Man abandoned to his own instincts is not what Jean Jacques Rousseau depicts. He is not a high-minded being whom social intercourse alone has spoilt. He is self-seeking to such a degree that

---

*carne mea, bonum; nam velle, adjacet mihi; perficere autem bonum, non invenio. Non enim quod volo bonum, hoc facio; sed quod nolo malum, hoc ago. Si autem quod nolo, illud facio, jam non ego operor illud, sed quod habitat in me peccatum. Invenio igitur legem, volenti mihi facere bonum, quoniam mihi malum adjacet. Condelector enim legi Dei secundum interiorem hominem; Video autem aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meæ, et captivantem me in lege peccati, quæ est in membris meis. Infelix ego homo! quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus? Gratia Dei per Jesum Christum, Dominum nostrum (Rom. vii. 15-25).*

<sup>1</sup> *Omne quod est in mundo, concupiscentia carnis est et concupiscentia oculorum et superbia vitæ (1 John ii. 15, 16).*

nothing has any value in his eyes except in so far as it can be profitable to himself. He counts as rivals those of his fellow-creatures who dare to contend with him for a particle of the happiness that he wishes exclusively to enjoy. According to Lord Bacon and Hobbes, each man is a wolf envying and envied by other wolves—*homo homini lupus*. In the eyes of the self-seeker, God Himself is but a tyrant who would fetter the freedom of man's impulses and hinder by the strong restraints of His moral laws the limitless expansion of man's nature.

The paganism of the Roman Empire, with its shameless profligacy and its ferocious cruelty, was the climax of the glorification of self. Christian charity—that is, forgetfulness of self and disinterested love for God and for one's neighbour—is its direct antithesis.

In this antagonism between self and charity lies the inner drama of every Christian life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is not our intention to analyze here in detail the selfish tendencies which rise up in constant conflict with the efficacious action of grace in our souls. This analysis, however, is a necessity for Christian prudence, as it forms the basis of those examinations of conscience that are the indispensable starting-point of all interior reformation. Nowhere will you meet with more precision and more truth to help you in this labour of analysis than in the "Imitation of Christ." We reproduce here for your convenience some signs by which you can discern the opposition between the flesh and the spirit, or, as the pious psychologist terms them, "nature" and "grace."

"Nature is crafty and draweth many away, and snareth and deceiveth them, and always proposeth self as her end. But grace considereth not what may be advantageous



Their respective manifestations and the vicissitudes of their conflicts form, according to the judicious remark of St. Augustine, the history of the human race : " Society is divided between two great loves—the love of self, carried to contempt of

---

and profitable to self, but rather what may be beneficial to many.

" Nature willingly receiveth honour and respect. But grace faithfully attributeth all honour and glory to God.

" Nature is afraid of shame and contempt. But grace is glad to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus.

" Nature loveth ease and bodily repose. But grace cannot be idle, and willingly embraceth labour.

" Nature doth all for her own gain and interest ; she can do nothing gratis, but hopeth to gain something equal or better for her good deeds, or else praise or favour, and coveteth to have her actions and gifts and sayings highly esteemed. Nature easily complaineth of want and of trouble.

" Grace beareth poverty with constancy.

" Nature turneth all things to self, and contendeth and disputeth for self. But grace referreth all things to God, from whom they originally proceed ; she desireth not to have self, or what belongeth to self, exalted, but wisheth that God may be blessed in His gifts, who bestoweth all things out of mere love.

" This grace is a supernatural light, and a certain special gift of God, the proper mark of the elect, and the pledge of eternal salvation, which elevateth a man from earthly things to love such as are heavenly, and from being carnal maketh him spiritual.

" Wherefore as nature is the more kept down and subdued, with so much the greater abundance is grace infused, and every day by new visitations the interior man is reformed according to the image of God " (" Imitation of Christ," Bk. III., ch. liv.).

God, and the love of God, carried to contempt of self."<sup>1</sup>

To which of these loves shall we give the sovereignty? Will the soul lay down at the feet of the passions the crown wherewith her freedom crowned her? Will she seek for peace at the cost of a shameful surrender? Or will she follow the banner of Him who said, "I came not to send peace, but the sword"? Will she follow it, full of courage to face the fight and to seek peace through her enemy's overthrow?

## II

### THE WAR AGAINST OUR PASSIONS

No, my dear friends, it is not for those who are called to the service of God to seek by a shameful compromise with self a spurious and short-lived peace. True peace is the tranquillity of order, and order requires that each thing be in its place—that in a living and complex whole, such as the soul of a Christian, the inferior forms of sensuous activity be subordinate to the attainment of the moral and religious ideal. Peace bought only by a surrender would be criminal, and none but cowards seek it. "Our conscience must be tranquil, but in goodness,"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fecerunt civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei; celestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui* (St. Augustine, "De Civit. Dei," Bk. XIV., ch. xxviii.).

<sup>2</sup> *Alia est conscientia tranquilla et non bona alia bona e tranquilla* (St. Bernard, "Parvi Sermones," XVI.).

says St. Bernard. It is undeniable that man in the delirium of passion has the melancholy power to render himself deaf to the protests of his conscience, but sooner or later virtue asserts its rights. Once the frenzy of passion is over, the unhappy victim finds himself face to face with unsatisfied wants, tyrannized over by ambitions that he is powerless to gratify, pursued and maybe even despised by those who, like himself, hunger and thirst after their own paltry interests. Was it not from his own experience that St. Augustine spoke when he said : " For which way soever the soul of man turneth, it lighteth upon sorrow, excepting only when it turneth to Thee " ?<sup>1</sup>

" I was king over Israel," wrote Solomon, " and I proposed to my mind to seek and search out wisely concerning all things that are done under the sun. This painful occupation hath God given to the children of men. I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold all is vanity, and vexation of spirit. . . . I have spoken in my heart, saying : Behold, I am become great, and have gone beyond all that were before me in Jerusalem, and my mind hath contemplated many things wisely and I have learnt. . . . But I have perceived that in these also there was labour and vexation of spirit, because in much wisdom there is much indignation ; and he that addeth knowledge addeth also labour. Then I said in my heart : I will go and abound with delights and enjoy good things. . . . I made me

<sup>1</sup> " Confessions," Bk. IV., ch. x.

great works ; I built me houses and planted vineyards ; I made me gardens and orchards . . . and ponds of water. . . . I got me . . . herds of oxen and great flocks of sheep above all that were before me in Jerusalem. I heaped together for myself silver and gold, and the wealth of kings. . . . I made me singing men and singing women, and the delights of the sons of men, . . . and whatsoever my eyes desired I refused them not ; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure and delighting itself in the things which I had prepared. . . . Who shall so feast and abound with delights as I ? . . . And I saw that this also was vanity. . . . Laughter I counted error, and to mirth I said : Why art thou vainly deceived ? Therefore I was weary of my life when I saw that all things under the sun are . . . vanity and vexation of spirit. . . . The heart of the wise is where there is mourning, and the heart of fools where there is mirth !”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. i. 12 *et seq.* ; ii. 1 *et seq.* Thus did Solomon meditate in the midst of his worldly splendour. We can compare this extract from Ecclesiastes with the passages in “Faust” in which the hero of the poem gives vent to his feelings against the hardships of his life. He says : “I have studied philosophy, law, medicine, and theology, and what have I gained thereby ? Alas ! unhappy wretch that I am ! I find myself no better off than at the beginning ! I am cast down by failure ; I have neither money nor honours, nor from the world receive I any consideration. ‘Prohibition !’ ‘Renunciation !’—these are the hateful restrictions of man’s life, that bar his path at every turn. As I rise each morning I shudder at the prospect of facing another day, and I weep at the thought that it will never bring me the realization of a single desire.



No secure peace can be hoped for except in the triumph of the will over the desires and aversions of selfishness. The "old man" within us must be reduced to impotence, and this result can be brought about only by the vigorous and well-sustained practice of mortification. "Amen, amen," said Jesus to Nicodemus; "unless a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him: "How can a man be born again when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?" Jesus answered: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and of the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Wonder not that I said to thee, You must be born again. The Spirit breatheth where He will, and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He

When night comes, in vain do I seek repose. My slumbers are broken by frightful dreams. I curse all those empty visions of delight that fascinate me and still bind me to this world. I curse the overweening ambition that pretends to be all-sufficient in itself. I curse all those dazzling apparitions for ever making appeal to my senses. Cursed be the lying dreams of glory and immortality! Cursed be everything that here below flatters man with hopes of happiness in the possession of it—wife, child, bondman, chattel! Cursed be Mammon, the prince of this world, who spurs us on to strive for the treasures he displays, or for the voluptuous ease he so readily prepares for us! Cursed be the wine-cup and the highest favours love can bestow! Cursed be all faith and hope, and yet thrice cursed be patience!"

goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

This rebirth to a higher life is, of course, the Sacrament of Baptism. But the grace of this Sacrament is a germ that demands development. It will find its natural growth, it will attain to its full maturity only in the soil where the Divine Gardener has sown it—that is, on the ruins of the "old man." Claude Bernard tells us under a paradoxical form that life is death. He means that whereas the general forces of exterior nature attack the organism, subjecting it to an incessant partial decomposition, the living being maintains its equilibrium by its internal power of reaction, and, being constantly renovated, pursues triumphantly the course of its existence.

So also does our physical life develop within us, unceasingly, unconsciously. Food nourishes it; sleep restores it; the impressions made on us by external objects feed our imagination and arouse our passions; the inevitable use of the things that are necessary for our preservation implants within us the instinct of property, increases within us the lust for gain, the ambition to rise, to obtain mastery over our fellows; and all these impulses from below generate an unceasing war of the flesh against the spirit.

Baptism gives us the supernatural capacity for attaining perfection, but it does not give us perfection itself. Charity can never establish itself in the

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 3-8.

selfish soul. *Self-abnegation* is the one condition necessary for the triumph of charity. Each virtue we have acquired, says Cardinal Deschamps, is one for which we have fought and which we have won. Never will the spirit rise but on the ruins of the flesh.

The author of the "Imitation of Christ" warns us that spiritual progress is in direct proportion to the energy the soul employs against itself. "In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make."<sup>1</sup>

The history of God's saints bears witness that both the great contemplatives and the heroes of the apostolic life were all filled with the spirit of penance.

While clothing himself in the sacred vestments for the celebration of Mass, the Bishop begs of God to strip him of the vicious tendencies of the old man, to turn his heart from their suggestions, and to give him in their stead the virtues of the new man, on whom God has conferred from the beginning the spirit of justice and of true sanctity.<sup>2</sup>

And the first word of the priest at the foot of the altar is also to ask God for the renewal of his interior life. "I will go unto the altar of God, to God who giveth joy to my youth."

Yet do we not share the surprise of Nicodemus,

<sup>1</sup> "Imitation of Christ," Bk. I., ch. xxv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Exue me, Domine, veterem hominem cum moribus et actibus suis et indue me novum hominem qui secundum Deum creatus est in justitia et in sanctitate veritatis.*

that at our age we should still have to be born again ? Have not certain prayers that we recite several times a day become to us a dead-letter ? We say over and over again : " Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth." Then we fall back into our ordinary routine, our thoughts glide again into the vortex that whirls them hither and thither till some fault or some narrow escape from grievous sin reminds us sharply that we have ceased to make a stand against the evil tendencies of our nature.

My dear friends, do not let your hearts be led captive by the frivolities of a day, neither be dismayed nor disheartened by the austere law of Christian mortification.

Have you not heard the voice of the Baptist crying in the desert : " Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand." <sup>1</sup>

Are you ignorant of the programme of the Christian life, openly and solemnly promulgated by our Divine Lord ? Does He not tell us that happiness both in this life and in the next is conditional upon the detachment of the soul from all created things, upon resignation to the privations and sorrows of life, upon bearing patiently with hatred and contempt ? " Blessed are ye

<sup>1</sup> *Parate viam Domini, rectas facite semitas ejus. . . . Pœnitentiam agite : appropinquavit enim regnum cœlorum* (Matt. iii. 2, 3).





---

## Peace of Soul

---

poor. . . . Blessed are ye that hunger now . . . that weep now. . . . Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you . . . and cast out your name as evil for the Son of Man's sake."<sup>1</sup>

Superficial observers inquire why Christian asceticism should make such resistance to the allurements of the senses ; why man may not give free play to his natural instincts. The answer is to be found in the incontestable fact that God alone is good in essence—that is, of Himself and in His own nature ; therefore the inevitable consequence follows for our sinful selves that we must mortify our desires, and keep them in subordination, so that they may ultimately redound to the glory of God.

Created things have only a relative goodness : they are good, and therefore lawfully to be desired, only in so far as they can serve the interests of our conscience, and finally those of God Himself. Need I remind you of the proofs of this ?

At the moment when the Creator called the world into existence He could not but destine His work for Himself, for He alone existed. Since He alone exists by His own power, He alone is His own *raison d'être*. Consequently, all that is not He exists and subsists only by Him, and in Him alone has its reason for existing at all. "I am the beginning and the end."<sup>2</sup> "The Lord hath made all

<sup>1</sup> *Beati pauperes ; beati qui nunc esuritis . . . qui nunc fletis. . . . Beati eritis cum vos oderint homines . . . et exprobraverint* (Luke vi. 20-22).

<sup>2</sup> *Ego sum principium et finis* (Apoc. i. 8).

things for Himself'';<sup>1</sup> consequently, those aspirations only are good which, directly or indirectly, have God for their final end and aim. Therefore, all desires that turn us from our goal or tend only to satisfy self must be conquered—in other words, must be mortified.

St. Ignatius of Loyola took care to lay as the foundation of his Spiritual Exercises this principle of the Christian spiritual life: "Man was created for one end . . . this end is to praise, honour, and serve the Lord his God, and thus arrive at eternal happiness. Other things are but means by which to reach this last end; hence the obligation to use those creatures, or to abstain from their use, according as they draw him nearer to his end or withdraw him from it. So we must before all else establish ourselves in a state of complete indifference to all created things, even to those that are not forbidden, and, so far as we are able, not even prefer good health to illness, wealth to poverty, honour to humiliation, a long life to a short one. Order requires that we desire and choose once for all in all things that which leads us to the end for which we were created."

To secure in ourselves this holy subjection of our desires we must keep under control the cravings of self. If you compound with them, with your "life," says our Blessed Lord, who means us to understand by this word the evil tendencies of our nature, "you are lost." You must hate your

<sup>1</sup> *Universa propter semetipsum operatus est Dominus* (Prov. xvi. 4).

"life," and treat this rebel as an enemy if you wish to make sure of eternal life. "He that loveth his life shall lose it : and he that hateth his life in this world keepeth it unto life eternal."<sup>1</sup>

My dear friends, I beseech you to weigh most attentively and earnestly the full bearing of this Gospel truth. Take it as it stands ; strip it of nothing. Do not pick and choose from among the teachings of our Divine Saviour, taking only what appeals to your own tastes and predilections. If you do, you will simply deceive yourselves. This little planet of ours will disappear ; the whole firmament, with its myriad worlds, will pass away ; but every word of our Blessed Lord is unchangeable in its efficacy. "Heaven and earth shall pass, but My words shall not pass."<sup>2</sup>

God gave you faith as a gratuitous gift, but unless you co-operate with Him, unless you generously strive for the mastery over your passions, He will not save you.

Now, will you or will you not enter His service, accepting the conditions He has expressly laid down in no uncertain terms ?

This is the great problem which now presents itself to you. You have a limited number of years, months, days, hours, and minutes in which to solve it practically. Once this period has elapsed there

<sup>1</sup> *Qui odit animam suam in hoc mundo, in vitam æternam custodit eam* (John xii. 25. Cf. Luke ix. 24).

<sup>2</sup> *Cælum et terra transibunt, verba autem mea non præteribunt* (Matt. xxiv. 35).

will be no further hope of deciding it. Beyond this life, which marks the limit of your trial here below, time for you will be no more. On whichever side falls the tree which bears the fruits, good or evil, of your moral life, whether it fall to the right or to the left, there will it lie, unchanged for all eternity. It is much too little to say that this question is a serious one. It is the chief, it is the *only* one. Do not forget that it concerns you *alone*. No one else can settle it for you.

Have you ever pondered deeply upon this fact, letting it sink into your very soul : that it is to *you* individually, to your *own* free-will, helped by the grace of the Most High that the offers, the promises, and the threats of the Gospel are addressed ?

God grants you the incomparable privilege of spending several years in this quiet retreat, pervaded as it is with an atmosphere of purity, bathed in a flood of supernatural light. He brings you here that you may with riper and deeper thought solve the problem of your future. He gives you the means of forming within yourselves those strong and deep convictions which later on must be the mainstay of those who, with weaker faith than yours, are struggling in less favourable circumstances to work out their eternal salvation. Consequently, putting aside the duties towards your neighbour which your future ministry will demand of you, the fundamental obligation of your Seminary life is to meditate on the offer of Jesus Christ to your soul, and on the terms which He fixes for your



salvation. Listen to His words : " If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."<sup>1</sup> — Are you resolved to follow Me ? If so I accept you on condition that you *will* renounce self and carry your cross every day, walking in My footsteps.

Do you hear, do you understand His call ? God demands of you a clear, positive answer — a *Yes* or a *No*.

There is no question here of a mere wish, a conditional acceptance, a passing impulse ; the question is : Do you consent, after mature reflection, to give for answer a deliberate, resolute *I will* ?

Yes, I will, my beloved Jesus ; with the help of Thy grace, I will enlist under Thy banner. I know the terms of my engagement, and I accept them. I am resolved to withdraw my heart, as far as in me lies, from the solicitations of the " flesh," and to close my ears to the suggestions of the spirit of the world and the spirit of darkness. I know full well that without suffering I cannot succeed ; but I accept whatever pain the external mortification of my senses and the internal mortification of my pride will entail. It will be my daily cross, and I am resolved to carry it. Have I not, O my Divine Master, to stimulate and encourage me, the example of Thy life of labour and sacrifice, of Thy Passion and Thy Death ! Why should the servant want better treatment than his master ?

<sup>1</sup> *Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam quotidie et sequatur me* (Luke ix. 23).

My dear friends, do you know why so few men attain to sanctity? Do you know why those heroic lives, which should be our inspiration, appear to us so extraordinary? And why, instead of striving resolutely to imitate them, to reach as boldly and effectively as they, the end to which they have attained, we tamely content ourselves with mere admiration of them, as if they belonged to a race of giants and we to a race of pigmies?

The explanation of this enigma becomes plain to me when I attentively analyze my own interior. It is because we do not look closely enough into the life of our Blessed Lord; we do not study it with the firm, steady, unflinching gaze that misses nothing from the crib to the cross. And the reason why we shrink from this study is that as soon as we catch sight of the moral consequences it will entail, the new practical obligations to which we shall have to submit, the mortification of body and of mind that our Divine Model preaches to us—as soon, I say, as we foresee all this, we take fright, and, like St. Augustine in his struggles against grace, we try to comfort our souls with “To-morrow and to-morrow!” With the inquisitive sceptics of Athens who went to hear St. Paul, little expecting the disquieting tidings of the “judgments of God in justice” or the resurrection of the dead, we say only too willingly, “We will hear thee again concerning this matter.” It is only natural that your passions should rebel when you strive to bridle them. The

least restraint requires an effort. Privation means pain. Humiliation strikes us with dismay, and we shudder at the very idea of sacrifice. But no one wants you to love suffering for its own sake, to love pain because it is pain. What you are required to do is to love the greater more than the lesser good, and the one Supreme Good more than all else. Love God and His Christ, and this love will carry you triumphantly through the fiery furnace of suffering. "Love," says St. Augustine somewhere, "lightens the burden of suffering, or, if it lets us still feel the burden, teaches us to love it."<sup>1</sup>

Consider the perils and fatigues to which an explorer voluntarily exposes himself, the pains a merchant takes to further his business, the servility to which a heart can stoop when under the yoke of an unlawful love. And shall not our infinitely loving and lovable God have as much sway over His followers as glory, wealth, and worldly pleasures have over their votaries?

"Inflame, O Lord, our reins and our hearts with the fire of the Holy Ghost, that we may serve Thee with a chaste body and please Thee with a clean heart."<sup>2</sup>

Not for any created thing nor for any living being shall we allow ourselves to be separated from our

<sup>1</sup> *Ubi amatur, non laboratur ; aut si laboratur, ipse labor amatur.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ure igne sancti Spiritus renes nostros et cor nostrum, Domine, ut tibi casto corpore serviamus et mundo corde placeamus.*

Lord Jesus Christ. "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword?

"As it is written: 'For Thy sake we are put to death all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' But in all these things we overcome because of Him that hath loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

### CONCLUSION

My dear friends, set yourselves earnestly, I beseech you, to till the soil of your soul; fear neither plough nor harrow, but with them turn up its depths to the sun of Divine grace. Allow no weeds to flourish in it. Pluck them up by the roots, that the entire field may be left to the germs of supernatural life that Divine Providence has sown broadcast over it.

<sup>1</sup> *Quis ergo nos separabit a caritate Christi? tribulatio? an angustia? an fames? an nuditas? an persecutio? an gladius? Sicut scriptum est: Quia propter te mortificamur tota die, æstimati sumus sicut oves occisionis. Sed in his omnibus superamus propter eum qui dilexit nos. Certus sum enim, quia neque mors, neque vita, neque angeli, neque principatus, neque virtutes, neque instantia, neque futura, neque fortitudo, neque altitudo, neque profundum, neque creatura alia poterit nos seperare a caritate Dei, quæ est in Christo Jesu, Domino nostro* (Rom. viii. 35-59).



Eternal life is the only treasure we claim, and to obtain this we must learn to give up all the rest. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field, which a man having found, hid it, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."<sup>1</sup> *Matt. 13: 44*

The treasure of which the Gospel here speaks, says St. Gregory, is desire for the things of heaven; the field in which the treasure lies hidden is the retirement in which the soul strives to establish within itself the kingdom of God. To sell what we have in order to become possessors of this field is to renounce the pleasures of the flesh, to turn our backs on the attractions of worldly goods and set our hearts on the interests of a higher life; in one word, it is raising our souls to such a state that we no longer court what gratifies the flesh nor dread what mortifies it.<sup>2</sup>

My dear friends, let all your efforts tend towards fixing your souls in this permanent peace.

Every morning, when the hour strikes for the

<sup>1</sup> *Simile est regnum cœlorum thesauro abscondito in agro, quem qui invenit homo abscondit et præ gaudio illius vadit et vendit universa quæ habet et emit agrum illum* (Matt. xiii. 44).

<sup>2</sup> *Thesaurus autem cœleste est desiderium: ager vero, in quo thesaurus absconditur, disciplina studii cœlestis. Quem profecto agrum venditis omnibus comparat, qui voluptatibus carnis renuntians, cuncta sua terrena desideria per disciplinæ cœlestis custodiam calcat: ut nihil jam, quod caro blanditur, libeat; nihil quod carnalem vitam trucidat, spiritus perhorrescat* (St. Gregorius, Hom. XI. in "Evangelia").

recitation of Prime, send up to God your trustful petition :

*Sint pura cordis intima,  
Absistat et vecordia ;  
Carnis terat superbiam  
Potus cibique parcitas.  
Ut cum dies abcesserit,  
Noctemque sors reduxerit,  
Mundi per abstinentiam  
Ipsi canamus gloriam.*

Put into practice the teaching of this beautiful prayer, and your days and your actions will unfold themselves with order in the peace of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

When the shades of night draw near, remember the law of Christian vigilance : " Be sober and watch : because your adversary the devil like a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour ; whom resist ye strong in faith."<sup>2</sup> And then our good God, rejoicing at your vigilance, will deliver you ; He will keep you while you sleep. When you watch it will be in union with Christ, and when you rest it will be in peace.<sup>3</sup>

When in a little time hence it will be your privilege to mount the altar-steps, you will not hesitate to ask of God some share in the tears and sorrows of the Church. You will say while putting on the

<sup>1</sup> *Dies et actus nostras in sua pace disponat Dominus Omnipotens.*

<sup>2</sup> *Sobrii estote et vigilate, quia adversarius vester diabolus tanquam leo rugiens circuit quærens quem devoret : cui resistite fortes in fide.*

<sup>3</sup> *Salva nos, Domine, vigilantes, custodi nos dormientes, ut vigilemus cum Christo et requiescamus in pace.*

maniple : " May I, O Lord, be found worthy to bear the burden of sorrow and of tears, that with joy I may receive the reward of my labour."<sup>1</sup> Do not yield to imaginary fears. St. Alphonsus Liguori says we should not make for ourselves lively representations either of the good things of sense from which we must detach ourselves, or of the pains and privations we are voluntarily to endure.

With unquestioning faith yield yourselves up from the outset to the anointing grace of the Holy Spirit. The more freely you do so the more will His beams penetrate into and enlighten your minds ; your hearts will grow in strength, and " the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."<sup>2</sup>

Is it not an undeniable historical fact that the saints who were enamoured of suffering are very many ? How are we to explain this phenomenon—which to an observer taken up with carnal interests is inexplicable ?—unless it be by the power of Him whom we invoke when we say :

*Veni, Sancte Spiritus  
Et emitte cœlitus  
Lucis tuæ radium.*

\* \* \* \*

*O Lux beatissima,  
Reple cordis intima  
Tuorum fidelium.*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Merear, Domine, portare manipulum fletus et doloris ut cum exultatione recipiam mercedem laboris.*

<sup>2</sup> *Et pax Dei, quæ exsuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda vestra et intellegentias vestras in Christo Jesu (Phil. iv. 7).*

The more our spirit perceives invisible realities, the more does it become devoted to the Divine object of our love ; and in the same proportion does our natural fear of suffering diminish. If you dread penance, says St. Bernard, it is because you see the cross without seeing the unction of grace that will enable you to carry it.

Subordinate your every wish to the holy will of God and you will be a king. " To serve God is to reign."<sup>1</sup> Mortification is the great liberator. It alone has power to crown you sovereign in the kingdom of your own heart. It alone can give to prayer the wings that make it soar up to God. In the Office of St. Peter of Alcantara the Church addresses Almighty God in these terms : " O God, who hast vouchsafed to unite in Thy confessor, the blessed Peter, the glorious gifts of an admirable penance and the highest contemplation, grant us through his intercession that, mortifying our flesh, we may with greater facility understand the things of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

No, our Divine Redeemer does not deceive. Contradictory appearances notwithstanding, His yoke is sweet, and the burden He asks us to bear is light indeed. The peace He gives is not the mirage of false peace that the world holds out to

<sup>1</sup> *Servire Deo regnare est.*

<sup>2</sup> *Deus qui beatum Petrum confessorem tuum admirabilis pœnitentiæ et altissimæ contemplationis munere illustrare dignatus es ; da nobis, quæsumus, ut ejus suffragantibus meritis, carne mortificati, facilius cœlestia capiamus.*



its votaries : it is the serene and tranquil joy of the heart and soul. " My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid."<sup>1</sup> All the saints have experienced it. " I believe in witnesses that lay down their lives for the truth," says Pascal. It would be unreasonable not to believe in the sincerity of men who have come to relish suffering, and declare that they find therein all their delight. In this case the really ignorant, or rather the really guilty ones are ourselves, we who, placed between the world, the devil, and the flesh on the one hand, and on the other the solemn and indisputable affirmations of Jesus Christ, together with the evidence of His saints, are nevertheless weak enough to side practically with the former and against the latter ! A day will come—God grant it may not be too late!—when a full light will break in upon our intellect, and we shall be compelled to proclaim the truth we now resist. " We fools," shall we then cry out, " esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints."<sup>2</sup>

May God preserve us, my dear friends, from such a hopeless disenchantment ! " Let the peace of

<sup>1</sup> *Pacem meam do vobis ; non quomodo mundus dat, ego do vobis. Non turbetur cor vestrum neque formidet* (John xiv. 27).

<sup>2</sup> *Nos insensati, vitam illorum æstimabamus insaniam et finem illorum sine honore : ecce quomodo computati sunt inter filios Dei et inter sanctos sors illorum est* (Wisd. v. 5).

Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body.”<sup>1</sup> “Peace be with you!”<sup>2</sup> is the Bishop’s salutation. Receive it with filial docility, and, that I may practise with more zeal what I preach to you, I beg of God to listen to your fervent response: “May peace be with thy spirit also!”<sup>3</sup> Amen.

<sup>1</sup> *Et pax Christi exultet in cordibus vestris, in qua et vocati estis in uno corpore* (Col. iii. 15).

<sup>2</sup> *Pax vobis.*

<sup>3</sup> *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

## SEVENTH CONFERENCE

### EMMANUEL : GOD WITH US

*Ne timeas, quia ego tecum sum ; ne declines, quia ego Deus tuus ; confortavi te, et auxiliatus sum tibi et suscepit te dextera Justi mei.*

“ Fear not, for I am with thee : turn not aside, for I am thy God : I have strengthened thee, and have helped thee, and the right hand of my Just One hath upheld thee.”<sup>1</sup>

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

The first series of our Conferences is drawing to a close, and I would again remind you of the twofold purpose served by the Seminary. I have sought from the outset to show you that it is for you in the first place a house of *retreat*, and secondly a school where you will be *trained* for your sacred office.

Reserving for a future series the study of the conditions necessary for your special training, my chief object this year has been to make you appreciate the retirement that the Seminary affords, and to make you meditate on the responsibilities which in this same retirement you will begin to feel. Your piety and submission leave no room for doubt that you will make use of your solitude for the practice of recollection. You will find therein the means of

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xli. 10.

preparing your souls for effectual prayer ; you will gain insight into the mainsprings of your actions, and train your souls for the acquiring of peace.

“O God, who art ever the same, may I know myself, may I know Thee !”<sup>1</sup> Such was the fervent petition of St. Augustine ; and I am convinced that all your aspirations are summed up in this twofold ejaculation, under which lies the firm purpose to love only God and duty.

Will success attend your efforts, my dear friends ? What in reality will be the future that imagination pictures to you now ? We know your sincerity ; we know how Divine Providence has lavished its favours upon you, and how we would like to be able to assure you that not one amongst you will be a failure or ever deceive us ! But experience has taught us that many, notwithstanding the noble aspirations of their youth, have remained far below their ideal. The surroundings and influences that await you are so different from those that imagination leads you to expect. The conditions of the priestly ministry are very complex, and in our days they are so perilous that we cannot think of your future without apprehension. Whenever our eyes fall upon you, those words of the Gospel, expressing at once admiration and solicitude, recur to our mind : “What an one, think ye, shall this child be ? For the hand of the Lord was with him.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Soliloquies,” II., ch. i.

<sup>2</sup> *Quis putas, puer iste erit ? Etenim manus Domini erat cum illo* (Luke i. 66).



Even though your future is in the secret keeping of God, it is not difficult to foretell it in general terms. You will be the holy priests it is your calling and your avowed purpose to become, you will be useful and valiant sons of the Church, on the one condition that on leaving the Seminary your souls be deeply imbued with this twofold feeling: a humble distrust of yourselves, and an absolute trust in Divine Providence.

## I

## DISTRUST OF SELF

Pope Leo XIII. condemned, in his Encyclical, *Testem benevolentiae*, those who, under pretext of extolling what they were pleased to call the *active virtues*, undervalued those which they disdainfully termed *passive*—in particular, humility, self-renunciation and obedience. Besides, this division of virtue into two kinds is contrary to common sense, for no virtue exists but in the measure in which our free-will is brought into play.

“A purely passive virtue does not and cannot exist,” observes the Encyclical:—“Virtue, says St. Thomas, denotes a certain perfection of power, and the perfection of each thing must be judged according to the end for which it is intended. The object of power is action. . . . And an act of virtue is nothing else than a good use of free-will.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Virtus, quæ vere passiva sit, nec est nec esse potest:—Virtus, sic sanctus Thomas, nominat quamdam potentiæ perfectionem; uniuscujusque autem perfectio præcipue con-*

His Holiness Pius X., in his Encyclical, *Pascendi*, renews the condemnation issued by his predecessor, and points to the contempt for "passive" virtues as one of the characteristic marks of Modernism. In truth, Modernism under its moral aspect, just like Americanism in religion or the Renaissance in the fifteenth century, is a distortion of Christian virtue; it is a return, though sometimes an unconscious one, to a pagan conception of life. Plato, in one of his most beautiful dialogues, the "Gorgias," puts into the mouth of Callicles an exposition of the ideal of a happy life as conceived by the élite of intellectual society in Athens.

"Those whom you honour for their temperance," says Callicles, "are but fools. For, after all, how can a man be happy if he be subjected to any restraint? In perfect frankness will I declare to thee the things wherein the order of nature finds beauty and justice to consist. To lead a life of happiness man must give the fullest possible play to his passions; he must free them from all restraint, and, when they have reached their highest pitch of intensity, he must, by his skill and energy, find the means of satisfying them and of gratifying each and every desire according as it arises within him. I admit that the majority of men are incapable of attaining this end; therefore do the vulgar herd blame

---

*sideratur in ordine ad suum finem. Finis autem potentie actus est. . . . Et nihil est aliud actus virtutis, quam bonus usus liberi arbitrii* (St. Thomas, I<sup>a</sup> II<sup>æ</sup>, Art. I. in C. et ad 2).

the happy ones, seeking to throw discredit upon those who are intemperate. Such is the method they use to mask their lack of power." "Thou expoundest thy thought," said Socrates, "with much courage and freedom, clearly expressing what others think but dare not say."<sup>1</sup>

Look at the fresco in the Sistine Chapel, or at certain pictures of Rubens—the Rape of the Sabines, for instance, or the calamities of war—what do all these things picture to us but an intense development of physical life? And what are Titian's favourite subjects but sumptuous displays of sensual life? *Paucis vivit humanum genus*. Pagan society in the very best days of the Roman Empire was but a multitude of slaves at the service of a group of pleasure-seekers, wholly given up to the unbridled development of their physical life. The pagan starts from the principle that man is self-sufficient; consequently, his energy is in proportion to the confidence he places in the forces within himself.

Strange to say, Protestantism, which, at its origin, especially in the voice of Calvin, asserted itself to be the antithesis of pagan pride, and sought to destroy nature in man and substitute for it the domination of grace, has in fact brought its adherents to an anti-Christian exaltation of self. The disciple of Luther and Calvin is confined in his own individuality, having shaken off the yoke of the Church, and thus deprived himself of the social help she offers to her children. According

<sup>1</sup> Plato, "Gorgias," XLVI., ed. Didot.

as the lamp of faith burns lower and lower in his soul and religious indifference weakens his belief in Divine inspiration, he is reduced to dependence upon self as the mainspring of his actions. From the outset the Protestant stands alone, and being gradually withdrawn from the beneficent action of grace he takes the fatal step backwards towards the pagan condition in which nature can count only on itself. These moral dispositions have their effect in the physical order, and explain in part the kind of idolatry paid to the "intense life," and to its artificial manifestations in sports of all sorts in the different Anglo-Saxon countries, and to some extent in France and Belgium also.

An attentive observer will see in this an exaggeration, or even a parody, of the law that rules the moral behaviour of the free agent and makes the success of his undertakings dependent on his free co-operation. Our personal activity is necessary and, no doubt, morally obligatory, but it is never in itself sufficient.

When Virgil, who in the "Divine Comedy" personifies natural wisdom, arrives with Dante at the threshold of Paradise, he admits his incapacity to cross it, for that Almighty King

"Who reigns above, a rebel to His law  
Adjudges me, and therefore hath decreed  
That to His city none through me should come."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Perch' io fui rebellante alla sua legge,  
Non vuol che in sua città per me si vegna.*

"Inferno," Canto I., 121-123.



We are, in fact, formed by God for an end that theology calls "supernatural" in order to show that it surpasses the capacity and aim of nature. Nature is in itself radically incapable of leading us to our appointed end. The doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ, commented on by St. Paul and vigorously defended by St. Augustine against the naturalism of the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, is, that man abandoned to himself is incapable of conceiving a thought or of forming a desire that can contribute efficaciously to the salvation of his soul. "Without me you can do nothing,"<sup>1</sup> says our Lord. "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves as of ourselves," says the Apostle, "but our sufficiency is from God."<sup>2</sup>

The second Council of Orange, taking its inspiration from the theology of St. Augustine, draws a contrast between Christian and pagan courage. The latter has for its governing principle the desire to enjoy the good things of this world ; the former is inspired by Divine charity. Now, charity does not spring up in our hearts by the desire of our own ; it is gratuitously given us by the Holy Ghost, without its having been merited by any works of ours.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sine me nihil potestis facere* (John xv. 5).

<sup>2</sup> *Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis quasi ex nobis, sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est* (2 Cor. iii. 5).

<sup>3</sup> *Fortitudinem gentilium mundana cupiditas, fortitudinem autem Christianorum Dei caritas facit, quæ diffusa est in cordibus nostris, non per voluntatis arbitrium quod est a nobis, sed per Spiritum Sanctum qui datus est nobis, nullis meritis gratiam prævenientibus* (Conc. Arausic. II., Cap. XVII.).

In the first place, man has no right to attribute to himself what he possesses, since his very existence is the fruit of an absolutely gratuitous act of Divine omnipotence ; and not only this, but all the wealth with which his nature may be gifted is, beyond all comparison, inferior to the end which it has pleased Providence both to bestow and impose upon him.

Let us listen to St. Paul when he asks the Corinthians of what worth is the wisdom of the wise or the subtlety of the scribe, or the success of those who follow after the interests of this world : " Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?"<sup>1</sup>

And because the world's foolish wisdom could not raise its thoughts to the true God, it pleased Divine Providence to humble the world by preaching to it a Crucified Saviour. The Apostle tells his flock that what the world deems foolish is precisely what God makes use of to confound those whom it deems wise ; that what it scorns as weak will triumph over its mighty ones ; that what it rejects and counts as naught is chosen by God for the ruin

<sup>1</sup> *Ubi sapiens ? Ubi scriba ? Ubi conquisitor hujus sæculi ? Nonne stultam fecit Deus sapientiam hujus mundi ? Nam quia in Dei sapientia non cognovit mundus per sapientiam Deum, placuit Deo per stultitiam prædicationis salvos facere credentes. . . . Nos autem prædicamus Christum crucifixum. . . . Quæ stulta sunt mundi elegit Deus, ut confundat sapientes ; et infirma mundi elegit Deus ut confundat fortia, et contemptibilia mundi elegit Deus, et ea, quæ non sunt, ut ea quæ sunt destrueret, ut non gloriatur omnis caro in conspectu ejus (1 Cor. i. 20-29).*

of those who glory in themselves; for never will the Sovereign Power allow that "flesh should glory in His sight."

And this radical powerlessness of human nature to do anything worthy of eternal glory is not all, for, alas! does not each of us find in his manifold and daily failings enough to nourish within him a thorough distrust of self! My dear friends, there is no need to dwell long on this sad theme. What a depth of misery lies hidden in our consciences! Is there one amongst us who would not blush if the inmost secrets of his thoughts were unveiled before the public gaze, however indulgent that gaze might be? "I have never fathomed the conscience of a highwayman," says De Maistre; "but I have fathomed that of an honest man, and I can tell you that it is horrible!"

Let us for a moment suppose that the Supreme Judge were to open now the book of your days, and were to read to you the story of your works, your actions, your secret intentions, your inclinations to vice, your repugnance to virtue: how deeply you would blush at the recital!

"Now the book is open spread,  
Now the writing must be read,  
Which condemns the quick and dead. . . .  
What shall guilty I then plead? . . .  
Shame and grief are on my cheek;  
Sighs and tears my sorrow speak."

*"Liber scriptus proferetur  
In quo totum continetur  
Unde mundus judicetur. . . .*

*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus ? . . .  
Culpa rubet vultus meus,  
Supplici parce Deus."*

If God were to treat us with the rigour we deserve according to His justice, who among the children of men would dare to face His judgment? "If thou, O Lord, shalt mark iniquities, Lord, who shall abide it?"<sup>1</sup>

But suppose we draw a veil over the past, and gaze unflinchingly at our consciences as they appear in the eyes of God to-day. What deplorable irresolution in our behaviour! Over and over again we make promises to God to offend Him no more, and scarcely have we given Him our word when we shamelessly withdraw it, transgressing His law as before. Then we repent again of our unfaithfulness. Again we implore Him to spare us. Moved with Divine pity, He forgives us in His mercy, and prolongs our time of trial. . . . Alas! the sword of His justice is scarcely turned from us when we yet again forget His love, and provoke His anger afresh! "When chastisement is nigh, we confess our iniquities; let the threat be turned aside, and forthwith we forget the offences for which we wept. If Thou strikest, we implore Thee to spare; and if Thou sparest, we provoke Thee to strike."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine, Domine, quis sustinebit?* (Ps. cxxix. 3).

<sup>2</sup> *Confitemur in correctione quod egimus; obliviscimur post visitationem quod flevimus. Si extenderis manum, facienda promittimus; si suspenderis gladium, promissa non*



Thus the current of our lives flows on towards eternity, the flotsam of our faults and of our short-lived repentances strewn along its course. Ever alternating between guilt and repentance, we reach the end without finding ourselves firmly rooted in that state of moral integrity for which we so ardently sigh. Like Tantalus, we seem to see the life-giving water nearing, yet ever receding from our thirsty lips. "We confess to Thee our guilt, O Lord, and acknowledge that unless Thou dost pardon us our punishment is just."<sup>1</sup>

The greatest saints mourn over the misery of their souls. The more they are enlightened and purified by grace, the more they groan under the weight of their slightest faults ; the closer they are wrapped in the radiance of Divine purity, the more deeply do they suffer from the hideous contrast between their sinfulness and the sanctity of God. "Who," cries out St. Paul, "shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And in answer to his own question he tells us that all his trust is in the grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord. "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>2</sup>

---

*solvimus. Si ferias, clamamus ut parcas : si peperceris, iterum provocamus ut ferias* (Oratio a Papa Urbano VIII., edita).

<sup>1</sup> *Habes, Domine, confitentes reos : novimus quod, nisi dimittas, recte nos perimas* (Ibid.).

<sup>2</sup> *Quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus? Gratia Dei per Jesum Christum Dominum nostrum* (Rom. vii. 24, 25).

What madness, then, it would be to trust to ourselves for our eternal salvation !

The Evangelist tells us that there stood one day in the Temple a Pharisee and a publican. The Pharisee, strong in the consciousness of his good works, his alms and his fastings, deemed himself highly virtuous, and in his pride he scorned the humble publican, who, "standing afar off," would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven, but struck his breast, saying : "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Then, contrasting the self-righteous man, contemptuous of the miseries of others, with the sinner who openly confessed himself unworthy, and prayed for mercy, our Divine Master holds the Pharisee up to reprobation, and assures us that the publican returned to his home relieved of the burden of sin and comforted by the approval of his Heavenly Father.<sup>1</sup>

My dear friends, this vivid scene which the Gospel lays before us is a true picture of the moral dispositions with which you should enter upon your career. It comforts us to see that you have noble aims, high hopes of conquest and a great desire for progress in virtue ; but make sure before engaging in the fight that self will not be the object of your efforts, that your ideal will always be not *your*

<sup>1</sup> *Dico vobis, descendit hic justificatus in domum suam ab illo, quia omnis qui se exaltat humiliabitur et qui se humiliat exaltabitur* (Luke xviii. 14).

success, but the success of Him to whom is due all honour and glory.<sup>1</sup>

The demon of vanity and pride will seek to circumvent you ; he will dazzle your fancy with vain dreams of a brilliant and successful future. " See," he will whisper to you—" see all that lies within your grasp. Rely upon me, and your influence will spread far and wide ; your rivals will be left behind and the world will applaud your success. Honours will crowd upon you ; even great renown will be yours."

But what is this other voice that comes up from the desert ?—" Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him only."<sup>2</sup> To this voice alone you must lend an ear. Your pride, instead of being flattered, must be mortified.

In our last address we dwelt upon the fact that the seeds of virtue germinate and grow only when sown on the ruins of our lower nature. The grain of corn remains unfruitful as long as it is not hidden in the earth, and even when there it must die before it can give promise of a harvest.<sup>3</sup>

No, no ; humility is by no means an abdication of our personality. On the contrary, its practice means a most intense and lifelong effort of our moral

<sup>1</sup> *Soli Deo honor et gloria* (1 Tim. i. 17).

<sup>2</sup> *Dominum Deum tuum timebis et illi soli servies* (Deut. x. 20).

<sup>3</sup> *Nisi granum frumenti cadens in terram mortuum fuerit, ipsum solum manet ; cum autem mortuum fuerit, multum fructum affert* (John xii. 24, 25).

courage. Man needs no strength of will to follow the downward course of his passions, or to pursue the wild dreams that flatter his vanity ; but he must be strong indeed to wrestle with them and overcome them as the law of Christian self-denial requires him.

This courage of the will, my dear friends, is what I expect of you. You will imbibe it at its very fountain-head ; for, conscious of your incapacity and shortcomings, you will ground your faithfulness on the omnipotence of God, while you shelter your weakness on the bosom of His mercy.

You must not imagine, however, that we would have you suppress individuality of character. All gifts of God, whether they be natural or supernatural, have their providential appointment, and it would be both foolish and sinful to let them wither away in unfruitfulness. You must stifle neither your affections nor your desires. Had Callicles contented himself with claiming for all forms of human activity the right of existence and the faculty of expansion, Christianity would not disown the Athenian conception of life. Moral action is both sustained and intensified by imagination and feeling—on this condition, however : that they move within their own spheres, and play none but the parts allotted to them. If all the forces of nature were to develop without check or counterpoise, cosmos would soon give way to chaos. No, Callicles ; a violent expansion of inordinate forces is *not* sufficient to realize the beautiful ; justice does *not* consist in satisfying



all the cravings of the clever and the strong at the expense of the ignorant and the weak. The beautiful, which is the resplendence of order, requires that each of the forces that generate it should keep in its own place and remain within the bounds assigned to it. Justice, whose function it is to balance the rights of all, protests against the usurpations of the pleasure-seeker and the violence of the despot.

Those who accuse the Gospel and the Church of opposition to the natural expansion of human energy are slanderers. The Gospel and the Church, far from censuring activity, respect it ; and because they respect it they withdraw it from the dangers of disorder, thereby protecting right order in man and in society. It is *anarchy* alone that they condemn.

The Gospel disowns neither talent, nor riches, nor well-being, whether individual or social ; nor does it discourage a sustained effort towards progress.

The Church, acquainted with the usual way of humanity, is well aware that the masses are generally piloted by the select few. In the most brilliant centuries of its history—in the fourth, for instance, the era of theology and its greatest doctors ; in the thirteenth, those most flourishing days of philosophy ; in the fifteenth and eighteenth, the golden ages of art, eloquence, and history—did she not sufficiently prove her sense of the obligation which her own apostolic mission owed to those very influences that Le Play calls “ the social authorities ” ?

St. Paul's protestation against the scribes and Pharisees was by no means a plea against enlightenment and progress ; it was a plea for sincerity and truth.

He does not attack the law of Moses, nor the authorized commentators thereof, but the hypocritical monopoly of the law by those commentators who turned it to their own profit and aggrandizement. He in no way makes light of natural wisdom : he gives evidence, especially in his discourse at the Areopagus, of acquaintance with the masters of Grecian philosophy ; but he censures the pride of those whose thoughts are focussed on themselves, and who strive to mislead the ignorant. The advantage of the latter over the learned does not lie in their ignorance, but in their freedom from that pride which is a stumbling-block to those who misuse their learning.

Make the most you can, then, my dear friends, of every natural talent with which God has gifted you ; but, unlike the Rabbins of Judæa and most of the philosophers and great ones of pagan society, confess humbly that all you have has been given unto you. "What hast thou that thou hast not received ? and if thou hast received, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received (it) ?"<sup>1</sup> God in His goodness leaves to you the merit of your works ; it is only fair to leave Him all the honour thereof.

Recall gratefully to your minds that His mercy alone raised you when you were fallen ; that if left

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 7.

to yourselves you could neither discover nor suspect the marvels of grace and glory that His goodness reserves for those who love Him. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."<sup>1</sup>

Lend an ear to the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the purest of creatures, the Queen of Virgins, the Queen of Martyrs, and the bravest of them all. She will reveal to you the secret of her greatness.

"And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour, because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed, because He that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is His Name. And His mercy is from generation unto generation to them that fear Him. He hath shown might in His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart; He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble." Take the *Magnificat* as a subject of meditation; it will teach you the full meaning of Christian abnegation, and at the same time it will show you how the soul finds its strength in God.

St. Augustine tells us somewhere that he who sins by the intellect will perish by the flesh.

<sup>1</sup> *Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quæ præparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum* (1 Cor. ii. 9).

There was a young priest whom I cannot recall to mind without a heartache. He was intelligent, generous, full of noble ambition. His directors had earnestly urged on him the necessity of practising humility and prudence. But these "passive" virtues had no attraction for him; he dreaded humiliation; his soul thirsted for a broader atmosphere, for a larger liberty. He longed to cut his moorings, confident in his own strength to keep to the right track. Hardly a few months after his ordination—which he received, I must say, with piety—his ardent heart conceived an attachment which he persisted in considering harmless, but which unquestionably would have led him to his ruin had not an extraordinary circumstance arrested him on the very brink of the precipice. A merciful intervention of Providence brought him back to the path of his priestly vocation—with a heart now at last filled with a deep and salutary distrust of his own weakness.

Who knew better than St. Augustine both the weakness of the human heart and the infinite resources of a will that is submissive to God's grace? "Are you filled with ambitious hopes?" he asks; "if so, begin by being very lowly. Have you conceived the project of building a lofty edifice? Then busy yourself first of all with laying the foundations thereof deep in the earth. The loftier your edifice is to be, the deeper must be the foundations on which it is to rest. While you build, the edifice rears itself aloft, but to dig the foundations you



must stoop low. Be careful, then, to keep this rule. Before we can see the building rise, it must have sunk deeply into the earth, and nothing solid will show above ground but what rests firmly upon the hidden foundations."<sup>1</sup>

No doubt to will and to do are in a sense one and the same thing,<sup>2</sup> but the reasonable will subjects itself to the will of Divine Providence, and appeals to it for help to do what is above its strength when left to its own resources. To expect all from God is mere fatalism and false mysticism. To expect all from oneself is presumption. Distrust of self, when it stands alone, paralyzes the will ; when it goes hand in hand with trust in God, it gives to the soul the support of right order and the feeling that it is in possession of the truth ; it authorizes all initiative effort, raises the soul to heights from which she can quell every resistance of her inferior appetites, and renders her capable of achieving great success. Our will, aided by the grace of God, is the adequate principle of the act by which we are saved.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Magnus esse vis ? A minimo incipe. Cogitasne magnam fabricam construere celsitudinis ? de fundamento prius cogites humilitatis. Et quantum quisque vult et disponit superimponere molem ædificiæ, quanto erit majus ædificium, tanto altius fodit fundamentum. Et fabrica quidem cum construitur, in superna consurgit : qui autem fodit fundamentum, ad terram deprimitur. Ergo et fabrica ante celsitudinem humiliatur, et fastigium post humiliationem erigitur* (St. Augustine, "Sermo 10 de Verbis Domini").

<sup>2</sup> The French saying : *Vouloir c'est pouvoir*.

<sup>3</sup> *Gratia Dei mecum* (1 Cor. xv. 10).



## II

## ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE IN GOD

The man of action finds his firmest support in the certainty that he is not labouring alone : God is with him. The Lord, says Isaias, is our Emmanuel—God with us. He periodically renews before our eyes the wonders of Creation so that we may note His presence.

The events of history speak of His plans regarding humanity : “ He hath made of one, all mankind to dwell upon the whole face of the earth, determining appointed times and the limits of their habitation ; that they should seek God, if haply they may feel after Him or find Him, although He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live and move and are.”<sup>1</sup>

His fatherly care extends to each one of us. To each one has He assigned a place in the universal order, fixing the date of his entrance on the scene of this world ; to each one has He given strength proportionate to his task, and He expects from man's co-operation the accomplishment of his destiny. His assiduous care extends even to those of His creatures that He has not gifted with intellect. “ Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor do they reap, nor gather into barns ; and your Heavenly Father feedeth them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field how they grow, they labour

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 26-28.

not, neither do they spin ; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these."<sup>1</sup>

In the tissue of each one's life there is a warp of joy and a woof of sorrow. The former tells us of the kindness of our Heavenly Father, and awakens gratitude in our hearts ; the latter reminds us of the shortness of our time here below, where we have indeed to climb the steep and narrow paths of virtue, but can ever keep in sight the home where joy is to be our portion for eternity.

Were we more heedful of the voice that speaks to us in passing events, each of them would whisper to us of God and would induce us to bless His Holy Name, for all contribute directly or indirectly to our happiness. "To them that love God all things work together unto good."<sup>2</sup> "The voice of rejoicing and of salvation is in the tabernacles of the just ; the right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength."<sup>3</sup> "Thou art near, O Lord, and all Thy ways are truth "<sup>4</sup>—Thy providence carries out most faithfully all Thy promises. Wheresoever we may be and whatsoever may be our task, if, conscious that we are where Providence wishes us to be, we strive to do our duty, God will be there to help us ;

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 26, 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Diligentibus Deum, omnia cooperantur in bonum* (Rom. viii. 28).

<sup>3</sup> *Vox exultationis et salutis in tabernaculis justorum : Dextera Domini fecit (faciens) virtutem* (Ps. cxvii. 15, 16).

<sup>4</sup> *Prope es tu, Domine, et omnes viæ tuæ veritas* (Ps. cxviii. 151).

He will hold us in the hollow of His hand, and will allow no grievous harm to hurt us. "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them."<sup>1</sup>

The mission that is entrusted to us cannot be fulfilled without our labour, but if we co-operate ungrudgingly with the all-powerful, all-wise, and all-holy Master who requires that we shall do so, our efforts will most infallibly succeed. I do not say that our mission will succeed in the measure of our expectations. It may happen to us to mistake its true bearing, and to substitute for the designs of Providence our own narrow views, deceived by the forecasts of an overactive imagination ; but sooner or later, and very often even in this life, a light will shine over the road we have travelled, showing us that Providence never errs and never has misled our steps. "O God, whose providence never faileth in what it doth order, we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all things hurtful, and to give us all things profitable to us."<sup>2</sup>

Whatsoever difficulties may arise, could there be anything more comforting or better calculated to establish the soul in peace than this thought : I labour not alone ? Provided I do my duty, I have a

<sup>1</sup> *Iustorum animæ in manu Dei sunt et non tanget illos tormentum mortis* (Wisdom. iii. 1).

<sup>2</sup> *Deus cujus Providentia in sui dispositione non fallitur : te supplices exoramus, ut noxia cuncta submoveas, et omnia nobis profutura concedas* (Prayer for the seventh Sunday after Pentecost).



right to expect the constant and efficacious help of my God. Between His omnipotence, His infinite wisdom, His fatherly love on the one side, and on the other my weakness, my ignorance, my unworthiness, a sort of contract has been drawn up : my part is to do what in me lies ; His, to sustain me according to that inspired prayer : “ Uphold me according to Thy word, and I shall live ; and let me not be confounded in my expectation.”<sup>1</sup>

St. Bernardine of Siena affirms that, as a rule, God calls on no one to fill a position, no matter how elevated, without giving him in abundance the help necessary both for himself and for the honour of the functions he has to fulfil.<sup>2</sup>

Generally speaking, the plans of Divine Providence mature slowly, and by the regular co-operation of secondary causes. It has ordained that the sowing time should come before the harvest, and that the sower, who, no less than the reaper, has his share in the general work, should, like him, receive the reward due to his labours. Then, when the harvest is over, those who will bear in triumph the richest sheaves into the granaries of our Heavenly Father are precisely those who take up joyfully here below the hardest tasks, and do their duty in obscurity. “ Going they went and wept, casting

<sup>1</sup> *Suscipe me secundum eloquium tuum et vivam, et non confundas me ab expectatione mea* (Ps. cxviii. 116).

<sup>2</sup> *Generalis regula est, quod quandocumque divina gratia eligit aliquem ad aliquem sublimem statum, omnia charismata ei donet, quæ illi personæ sic electæ et ejus officio necessaria sunt, atque illam copiose decorant* (Sermo I., St. Joseph).

their seed ; but coming they shall come with joyfulness, carrying their sheaves."<sup>1</sup>

Did not our Blessed Saviour ask the crowd that surrounded Him, if there could be found amongst them a single father hard-hearted enough to give a stone instead of bread to his hungry child, or a scorpion when asked for an egg ? And He added : " If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him ?"<sup>2</sup>

We are guilty, it is true ; we constantly offend our good God ; but, thanks be to His loving mercy, are we not always near to the fountains of forgiveness ? What numberless ways has the Church given us of washing from our souls the stains of our daily venial sins !—the reception of a Sacrament ; an act of sincere repentance, such as that expressed in the Confiteor or in the Lord's Prayer when we say, " Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us " ; any act of religion that comprises a desire of penance, such, for instance, as using holy water ; piously making the sign of the cross, especially in response to the blessing of a Bishop ; a humble genuflexion ; and, indeed, all those religious rites that theology calls sacramentals, no doubt because the Church in instituting them saw therein some analogy

<sup>1</sup> *Euntes ibant et flebant mittentes semina sua ; venientes autem venient cum exultatione portantes manipulos suos* (Ps. cxxv. 6).

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 13.

with the Sacraments properly so-called, instituted by Our Lord Himself.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, we fall daily into sin, but it depends upon ourselves to prevent our weakness from impairing our moral dispositions. If, as soon as we notice that we have fallen, we rise up bravely, saying from the bottom of our hearts "*Mea culpa*," we may be sure that our will remains faithful to God.

Let both the priest of the Lord who day after

<sup>1</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes in the following terms three sorts of means by which we can obtain from the Divine Mercy the forgiveness of venial sin :

*Ad remissionem venialis peccati non requiritur novæ gratiæ infusio, sed sufficit aliquis actus procedens ex gratia, quo aliquis detestetur peccatum veniale vel explicitè vel saltem implicitè, sicut cum aliquis ferventer movetur in Deum.*

*Et ideo, triplici ratione, aliqua causant remissionem venialium peccatorum ; uno modo, inquantum in eis infunditur gratia : quia per infusionem gratiæ tolluntur venialia peccata. . . . Et hoc modo per Eucharistiam et Extremam Unctionem, et universaliter per omnia sacramenta novæ legis in quibus confertur gratia, peccata venialia remittuntur. Secundo, inquantum sunt cum aliquo motu detestationis peccatorum ; et hoc modo confessio generalis, tunsio pectoris et Oratio Dominica operantur ad remissionem venialium peccatorum ; nam in Oratione Dominica petimus : Dimitte nobis debita nostra. Tertio modo, inquantum sunt cum aliquo motu reverentiæ in Deum, et ad res divinas ; et hoc modo benedictio episcopalis, aspersio aquæ benedictæ, quælibet sacramentalis unctio, oratio in Ecclesia dedicata, et si aliqua alia sunt hujusmodi, operantur ad remissionem venialium peccatorum.*

*Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod omnia ista causant remissionem peccatorum venialium, inquantum inclinant animam ad motum pœnitentiæ, qui est detestatio peccatorum vel implicitè vel explicitè (St. Thomas, III<sup>a</sup>, q. 87, in C. et ad 1).*

day mounts the altar-steps, and the Christian who follows him there in spirit, offer to God each day their goodwill in union with the Divine Victim, saying: "Accept, O Holy Father, Almighty, Eternal God, this Immaculate Host which I, Thy unworthy servant, offer unto Thee, my living and true God, for my innumerable sins, offences, and negligences, and for all here present, as also for all faithful Christians both living and dead, that it may be profitable for my own and for their salvation unto life everlasting. Amen."<sup>1</sup>

What more is needed to maintain us in the closest friendship with God? Were you even, O Christian soul, to fall into grievous sin, you must not lose courage. It is not the fall that ruins us; it is the refusal to rise again. "The fear of death oppresses me because, sinning daily, I do not repent daily of having sinned."<sup>2</sup>

Does not the Church sing on the great day that comes between the celebration of Christ's Passion and that of His Resurrection these fearless words: "O how admirable is Thy goodness towards us! O how inestimable is Thy love! Thou hast delivered up Thy Son to redeem a slave. O truly necessary sin of Adam which the death of Christ has blotted

<sup>1</sup> *Suscipe, sancte Pater, omnipotens æterne Deus, hanc immaculatam hostiam, quam ego indignus famulus tuus, offero tibi Deo meo, vivo et vero, pro innumerabilibus peccatis et offensionibus et negligentis meis, et pro omnibus fidelibus christianis vivis atque defunctis: ut mihi et illis proficiat ad salutem in vitam æternam. Amen.*

<sup>2</sup> *Peccantem me quotidie, et non me pœnitentem, timor mortis conturbat me (Officium Defunctorum).*



out ! O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer !"<sup>1</sup>

And is it not in the same spirit that St. Augustine says, when commenting on those words of St. Paul, "To them that love God all things work together unto good"—"Yes, everything, even sin" ?<sup>2</sup>

The reason is, my dear friends, that sin deepens within us the feeling of our weakness ; it renders our humility more sincere and our want of God more keen ; it casts us on our knees ; it increases our gratitude, and kindles within generous souls a thirst for sacrifice and reparation. In Heaven, Peter the repentant deserter of his Master, Paul the converted persecutor, Magdalen the reclaimed courtesan, will confidently take rank with John the faithful precursor, with that other John "whom Jesus loved," with the purest of those contemplative women who are the brightest ornaments of the Church ; and the harmony of their souls will enable us to understand how the various aspects of God that here below we term His "perfections" are all blended in the unity of His substantial love. "God is charity."<sup>3</sup>

God's forgiveness is not a pious fiction. The

<sup>1</sup> *O mira circa nos tuæ pietatis dignatio ! O inæstimabilis dilectio caritatis : ut servum redimeres, Filium tradidisti ! O certe necessarium Adæ peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est ! O felix culpa, quæ talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem !* (Officium Sabbati Sancti, in Benedictione Cerei.)

<sup>2</sup> *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum . . . omnia, etiam peccata* (In Rom. viii. 28).

<sup>3</sup> *Deus caritas est* (1 John iv. 8).

clemency of our Divine Judge is not merely a mantle thrown over our sins to hide their hideousness. Absolution removes from the soul the sins that sullied it, and restores it to that state in which it was before it sinned. The converted sinner is not like that convict whose fetters were worn by St. Vincent of Paul, but whose soul, in the eyes of God and of his own conscience, still bore its guilt. Under the action of redeeming grace sin melts away from the soul like mud-stained snow in a thaw. After the sun has shone on it the soil resumes its firmness, and no trace is to be found of the mire that so lately sullied it. The forgiven soul has the brightness of the soul that has retained its innocence, and the Divine Goodness, with equal complacency, sees itself reflected in both.

“The mercies of the Lord,” says Jeremias; “that we are not consumed, because His commiserations have not failed; they are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness! The Lord is my portion; . . . therefore will I wait for Him. The Lord is good to them that hope in Him, to the soul that seeketh Him. It is good to wait with silence for the salvation of God.” Again the Prophet tells us it is good that the sinner should “put his mouth in the dust if so be there may be hope, for the Lord will not cast off for ever. For if He hath cast off, He will also have mercy according to the multitude of His mercies; for He hath not willingly afflicted nor cast off the children of men.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lam. iii. 22-26, 29, 31-33.

How low soever you may have fallen, never give up hope. Cry out to God from the bottom of the abyss: "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice. Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication."<sup>1</sup>

Meditate on the beautiful prayer of the Church: "O God who dost manifest Thine almighty power chiefly by sparing and by shewing mercy, multiply upon us Thy mercy, that we, running to Thy promises, may be made partakers of the good things of heaven."<sup>2</sup>

Who would hesitate to ask of God what He most delights in giving? It is not enough, however, my dear friends, to abstain from all distrust in our Heavenly Father; we must have positive, absolute, most childlike confidence in Him. The act of hope, a thing strictly obligatory on all Christians, is not, as many erroneously think, a mere conjecture based upon motives more or less probable; it is a most sure expectation, a *certainty*.

God has promised heaven to men of goodwill; we should wrong Him were we to doubt either the sincerity of His promise, the faithfulness of His will to keep it, or His power to carry it out.

<sup>1</sup> *De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine, Domine, exaudi vocem meam. Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ* (Ps. cxxix. 1, 2).

<sup>2</sup> *Deus qui omnipotentiam tuam parcendo maxime et miserando manifestas: multiplica super nos misericordiam tuam, ut ad tua promissa currentes, cælestium bonorum facias esse consortes* (Collect for the tenth Sunday after Pentecost).

"How can I distrust my God?" St. Theresa used to say, when her companions, seeing her without resources, seemed doubtful of Providence. "He knows all; He can do all; *and He loves me.*"

Those who hope in God, but with some hesitation, prove that they have not sufficiently reflected on the fundamental motive for Christian hope. You may have to your credit a strong reserve of good works, and there is no harm in your rejoicing at it; but who amongst us is absolutely sure that he is worthy of love and not of hate? The infinitude of Divine Mercy, and the right we have thereto through the merits of Jesus Christ, on condition that we believe in it, and are willing to submit to the action of grace and to the law of God, of themselves guarantee to our confidence a support that nothing can shake. Did not our Blessed Saviour invariably lay the same condition on all those who implored Him to work a miracle? Have you faith in Me? That is, have you the firm conviction that I *can* cure you, that I *can* restore your sight, that I *can* give life to your paralyzed limbs, or raise one of you from the dead?

And does not the Church, who is the confidante of all the intentions of her Divine Spouse, end all her prayers by an appeal to the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, attesting His Divinity in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost in the Most Holy Trinity? "Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end."



Let us, then, return to the prayers of our Catechism, and say to Almighty God : " Most merciful God, I hope with firm confidence that, *through the merits of Jesus Christ*, Thou wilt give me life eternal ; and because Thou canst not, in Thy infinite wisdom, appoint an end without ordaining the means to reach it, I have the firm hope that Thou wilt give me all that will help me to obtain eternal life, *because Thou art infinitely good and all-powerful, and faithful to Thy promises*. In this firm hope will I live and die."

However, have we not already received, by an inexplicable privilege of the Divine Goodness, this eternal life, the full development of which we beg for ? Scarcely was I born when the Divine Mercy called me to the Gospel. At my very entrance into life It chose me, in preference to multitudes of the human race, to sanctify me by the waters of Baptism.

" Behold, as clay in the hands of the potter, so am I in Thy hand, O my God !"<sup>1</sup> Thou couldst have made me a coarse vessel, fit to be thrown aside ; Thou hast in Thy mercy fashioned my nothingness into a vessel of honour destined to adorn Thy sanctuary. Neither my will nor my efforts have in any way contributed to the bestowing of this privilege ; it comes from Thy mercy alone. " It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Non volentis, neque currentis, sed miseratione est Dei* (Rom. ix. 16).

“ O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God ! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? Or who hath been His counsellor ? Or who hath first given to Him, and recompense shall be made him ? For of Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things. To Him be glory for ever. Amen.”<sup>1</sup>

But, O my God, since I owe all to Thee, since I cannot without injustice attribute to myself anything, the certainty of my expectation is therefore all the more firmly established. If I have every reason for doubting my own stability, I have not one for distrusting Thy fidelity. Thou callest me to holiness. Thou didst destine me to reproduce in my life the model Thou hast set before me, Thine own Divine Son. As a consequence of this act of predestination, Thou hast called me to the true Faith. “ For whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son. . . . And whom He predestinated, them He also called. And whom He called, them He also justified. And whom He justified, them He also glorified. . . . If God be for us, who is against us ? He that spared not even His own Son, but delivered

<sup>1</sup> *O altitudo divitiarum sapientiæ et scientiæ Dei ! Quam incomprehensibilia sunt judicia ejus, et investigabiles viæ ejus ! Quis enim cognovit sensum Domini ? aut quis consiliarius ejus fuit ? Aut quis prior dedit illi, et retribuetur ei ? Quoniam ex ipso et per ipsum et in ipso sunt omnia : ipsi gloria in sæcula. Amen.* (Rom. xi. 33-36.)

Him up for us all, how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things ?”<sup>1</sup>

Let us never relax our hold of this strong support—our Christian *hope*. *Faith* received at our Baptism is our first grace, but as surely as the seed contains the plant and its fruits, so surely may we trust that, if we respond faithfully to the first advances of Divine mercy, our grace will develop, will increase, and will obtain from the goodness of God the crowning grace of all, final perseverance, by which we shall die in the state if not in the very act of charity.

“To Thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. In Thee, O my God, I put my trust. Let me not be ashamed. Neither let my enemies laugh at me : for none of them that wait on Thee shall be confounded.”<sup>2</sup>

The gifts of Divine Goodness will be showered upon you in the measure in which you will hope for them. “Let Thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, as we have hoped in Thee.”<sup>3</sup>

But you, my dear friends, have quite a special

<sup>1</sup> *Nam quos præscivit, et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus. Quos autem prædestinavit, hos et vocavit ; et quos vocavit, hos et justificavit ; quos autem justificavit, illos et glorificavit. Quid ergo dicemus ad hæc ? Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos ? Qui etiam proprio Filio suo non pepercit, sed pro nobis omnibus tradidit illum, quomodo non etiam cum illo omnia nobis donavit ? (Rom. viii. 28-32).*

<sup>2</sup> *Ad te, Domine, levavi animam meam. Deus meus, in te confido, non erubescam. Neque irrideant me inimici mei : etenim universi qui sustinent te non confundentur (Ps. xxiv. 1-3).*

<sup>3</sup> *Fiat misericordia tua, Domine, super nos quemadmodum speravimus in te (Ps. xxxii. 22).*

motive for putting your trust in God. You are called to further His interests in this world; you are His delegates to the peoples of the earth. When you entered this Seminary it was only after you had heard in your hearts the words of God addressed to Jeremias when He said, "Before I formed thee in the womb of thy mother I knew thee . . . and made thee a prophet unto the nations."<sup>1</sup>

You were perhaps far from thinking of it at the time; your thoughts, like those of Nathaniel resting under the fig-tree, may have been busy with quite different things; but I had assigned a work to you, and I sent Philip to call you to my service.<sup>2</sup>

Do not, like Jeremias, answer with trepidation: "Lord, I cannot speak, for I am a child; how can I be the minister of Thy word?"<sup>3</sup> as if you expected from your own personal power the result of your efforts.

No, such a thing you must not say, for it is neither on the human force of your words, nor on the brightness of your intellect, nor on the power of your personality, that the efficacy of your zeal will depend, but solely on the submissive spirit in

<sup>1</sup> *Priusquam te formarem in utero novi te, et antequam exires de vulva sanctificavi te, et prophetam in gentibus dedi te* (Jer. i. 5).

<sup>2</sup> *Priusquam te Philippus vocaret, cum esses sub ficu, vidi te* (John i. 48).

<sup>3</sup> *Nolite dicere: puer sum . . . quoniam ad omnia quæ mittam te, ibis, et universa quæcumque mandavero tibi loqueris* (Jer. i. 7).



which you will fulfil the mission I shall entrust to you.

I shall render you capable of carrying out all my behests and of executing all my orders. "Be not afraid at their presence : for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Think of the weighty words in which the Church proclaims your privileges. In the ceremonial for the consecration of a church she extols in rapturous terms the powers granted by God to the consecrator, and says : "O God, who hast granted to Thy priests a prerogative such that, whatever they accomplish with dignity and without omission should be as though Thou Thyself hadst done it, listen to our supplication. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

My dear friends, examine the principle on which you rest your hope. Do you lean on the fragile reed of your own strength, or on the all-powerful arm of God the Omnipotent ? Woe to you if you allow your pride or vanity to feed on the sentiment of your own worth ! Almighty God promises you His protection, but only on condition that you act in His Name.

Hear what the Psalmist says : "O Lord God of hosts, who is like to Thee ? Thou art mighty, O Lord, and Thy truth is round about Thee. . . . Thou spokest in a vision to Thy saints, and saidst . . . I have exalted one chosen out of My people. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Ne timeas a facie eorum, quia tecum ego sum dicit Dominus (Jer. i. 8).*

<sup>2</sup> *Deus qui sacerdotibus tuis tantam præ cæteris contulisti gratiam, ut quidquid ab eis digne ac perfecte agitur a teipso fieri credatur, præsta supplicibus tuis. . . .*



My hand shall help him and My arm shall strengthen him. The enemy shall have no advantage over him : nor the son of iniquity have power to hurt him. And I will cut down his enemies before him, and them that hate him I will put to flight. My truth and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name shall his horn be exalted.”<sup>1</sup>

Our mission is, after all, only a thing entrusted to our care ; our prerogatives are given us exclusively for the execution of a mandate, and in reality can serve only for its accomplishment. “ For Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting by us.”<sup>2</sup>

Have you ever pondered on the true meaning of these words, which too frequent use may have rendered commonplace—to do a thing in God’s name ? An ambassador acting in the name of his Prince may not allow himself to be influenced in the fulfilment of his mandate by his own ideas or feelings. Self-effacement is here his duty, his master’s will and wishes showing through him as light through a transparent medium. Honours will be showered upon him ; in public assemblies he will occupy the first rank ; but unless he be without intelligence he will very well know that all this homage is due, not to him, but to the person whom he represents. So it is with the priest in the fulfilment of his functions. The graces of the priesthood pass

<sup>1</sup> *Veritas mea et misericordia mea cum ipso et in nomine meo exaltabitur cornu ejus* (Ps. lxxxviii. 9-25).

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20.

through his soul, but they are destined for the faithful. These honour him, but his duty is to waft the incense of their reverence up to God alone.

Again, all human delegations are conventional. By mutual agreement the ambassador is treated as if he were the Prince, and his judgments are interpreted as the direct expression of the royal mind. In reality the Prince does not enjoy, unless in fancy or in retrospect, the honours paid him in the person of his envoy, and the word of the latter becomes his only by virtue of an ulterior ratification. But sacerdotal delegation, on the contrary, is effective in itself and at the very moment of its operation. I have no power in my ministry but in union with the one High Priest, Jesus Christ, and by virtue of His action, which is paramount. And, on the other hand, my power, under the sacerdotal action of Christ, is real at the moment I use it ; were it then to fail me, no ulterior compensation could give it validity.

An incident in the apostleship of St. Peter clearly demonstrates this twofold character—the essential insufficiency of the mere man, and the all-powerfulness of the delegate acting in the name of the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. The *Acts of the Apostles* tell us that a poor man who had been lame from his birth used to ask for alms daily at the gate of the Temple. Peter, who had come to the Temple with John, turned round to the beggar, who had called on him, and said : “ Look upon us.” He looked earnestly upon them, hoping that he should

receive something of them. But Peter said: "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have I give thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth arise and walk. And taking him by the right hand, he lifted him up, and forthwith his feet and soles received strength. And he, leaping up, stood and walked in with them into the Temple, walking and leaping and praising God." The crowd, full of enthusiasm, gathered at once round Peter, who addressed them thus: "Ye men of Israel, why wonder you at this? Or why look you upon us, as if by our strength or power we had made this man walk? . . . But the Author of life you killed, whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And in the faith of His name . . . the faith which is by Him, hath given this perfect soundness in the sight of you all."<sup>1</sup>

### CONCLUSION

And now, my dear friends, to conclude. What I have just said concerning the origin of our power as priests will serve to mark the transition between this first series of Conferences and the second series, in which I intend to dwell particularly on your vocation and on your future career.

Be deeply convinced of these two truths: that of

<sup>1</sup> *Viri Israelitæ, quid miramini in hoc aut nos quid intuemini, quasi nostra virtute aut potestate (pietate) fecerimus hunc ambulare? . . . Vos autem Auctorem vitæ interfecistis, quem Deus suscitavit a mortuis, cujus nos testes sumus. Et in fide nominis ejus . . . et fides, quæ per eum est, dedit integram sanitatem istam in conspectu omnium vestrum* (Acts iii. 1-16).



yourselves you are nothing,<sup>1</sup> yet that God will do great things through you.

Since of yourselves you are nothing, since all you have and are comes from God, do not attribute to yourselves your talents, your virtue, or the merit of your good works. Pride is a thief that would rob us of all. Say with all your hearts, not only for the love of truth, but to detach your souls from self: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake."<sup>2</sup>

Then at evening, when your day's work is over, turn again to your Heavenly Father, and say to Him, with the Apostles, in simple truth: Master, "we are but unprofitable servants."<sup>3</sup>

Yet you must lose nothing of your high aims, for the Lord says to you, as He said to the prophet Jeremias: "I have set thee this day over the nations and over kingdoms, to root up and to pull down . . . and to build and to plant."<sup>4</sup> "For thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee; and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak."<sup>5</sup>

And be assured that through your means He will accomplish great things for the exaltation of His Holy Name.

Far from allowing yourselves to be crushed under

<sup>1</sup> *Gratia Dei sum id quod sum* (1 Cor. xv. 10).

<sup>2</sup> *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini tuo da gloriam, super misericordia tua et veritate tua* (Ps. cxiii. 1, 2).

<sup>3</sup> *Servi inutiles sumus* (Luke xvii. 10).

<sup>4</sup> Jer. i. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Jer. i. 7.

the weight of trials, you will lean joyfully on the almighty arm of the Lord, letting no day pass without going a step forward on the road to perfection. "Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee: in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath set."<sup>1</sup>

"My beloved son," says our Heavenly Father to each one of you, "from the lowly vale in which the feeling of your inefficiency and your unworthiness keeps you, lift up your eyes to the mountains, whence help shall come to you."<sup>2</sup>

Let your trust in Him urge you to answer, with as much confidence as the Psalmist: "My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."<sup>3</sup> And your hope will not be vain. In His watchfulness He will not allow your foot to slip, for He is as close to you as the shadow of your right hand. He whom God keeps is well kept. "The Lord keepeth thee from all evil: may the Lord keep thy soul. May the Lord keep thy coming in and thy going out, from henceforth now and for ever."<sup>4</sup>

"O my God!" exclaims Bossuet, "Thou alone art

<sup>1</sup> *Beatus vir cujus est auxilium abs te; ascensiones in corde suo disposuit, in valle lacrymarum, in loco (locum) quem posuit* (Ps. lxxxiii. 6, 7).

<sup>2</sup> *Levavi oculos meos in montes, unde veniet auxilium mihi* (Ps. cxx. 1).

<sup>3</sup> *Auxilium meum a Domino, qui fecit cælum et terram* (Ps. cxx. 2).

<sup>4</sup> *Dominus custodit te ab omni malo; custodiat animam tuam Dominus. Dominus custodiat introitum tuum et exitum tuum, ex hoc nunc et usque in sæculum* (Ps. cxx. 7, 8).

necessary to me ! For Thee alone must I yearn ; to Thee alone must I long to be united. ' Fear God and keep His commandments : for this is all man.'<sup>1</sup> Whatever thou lovest, O man, provided thou lovest not God, thou hast lost naught of good. Let, then, the rest go by : reserve for thyself only to fear God and to love Him, for that is the whole duty of man. But then," continues the holy Bishop, " since God is alone, and since man considers himself as alone before Him, is there not to be found in man some one act which comprises all that is in him, and which at the same time responds to all that is in God ?"<sup>2</sup>

My dear friends, is there any question more likely than this to awaken your interest ? You are seeking after perfection. Where is it to be found ? It dwells in charity, which is the love of God for His own sake and of our neighbour for love of Him.

This love banishes all selfishness from the heart. Strive, therefore, to exclude self from your whole life, and to mould it into an abiding act of divine charity. The masters of the spiritual life have given various names to this act, the ideal at which you aim and to which you will attain in the measure of your zeal for moral and spiritual progress : they have termed it the Act of Holy Indifference ; the Act of Pure Love ; the Act of Self-surrender, or Filial Abandonment to God. They have given it many

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. xii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Bossuet, " Discours sur l'Acte d'abandon à Dieu." The whole of this admirable discourse is well worth reading ; it reveals the humble piety, and at the same time the genius, of this great Bishop.

forms of expression, but I doubt if there be any more forcible than that contained in a passage of the *Soliloquies of St. Augustine* to which we here give the form of a prayer :

“ O my God, in Thee do I place my entire confidence. To Thee do I abandon myself as completely as I can. I do not wish to be my own, nor to claim any independence, but I declare myself to be Thy slave, O Thou most clement and most generous of Masters ! So now, O Lord, Thou must indeed raise me from the earth and draw me ever more and more towards Thee ; neither must Thou allow anything to happen to me wherein my faith would not securely find its happiness.”<sup>1</sup>

#### FINAL WORDS

My dear friends, you must apply yourselves to the interior life all the more zealously because the times in which we live require of the priest a larger measure of outward activity than formerly. You must love solitude ; therein alone will God speak to your hearts. Learn to master your words, that you may be able to rule your thoughts.

Lend an attentive and willing ear to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit within you. “ For

<sup>1</sup> *Constanter Deo crede, eique te totum committe, quantum potes. Noli esse velle quasi proprius et in tua potestate, sed ejus clementissimi et utilissimi Domini te servum esse profite. Ita enim te ad se sublevare non desinet, nihilque tibi evenire permittet, nisi quod tibi prosit, etiam si nescias* (“ Soliloquies,” I., ch. xv.).



whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."<sup>1</sup>

Apply yourselves with earnestness and perseverance to intercourse with God ; whether in the solitude of your room at the foot of the Crucifix, or before the Tabernacle, or even in the comings and goings of life, " Pray without ceasing."<sup>2</sup>

Let your lives be mortified. The triumph of your free-will, the efficacy of Divine Grace and the serenity of your souls will be commensurate with your conquest of *self*.

Finally, never separate these two things, which comprise all aspirations towards holiness : a humble distrust of self and an absolute and most childlike confidence in Him whom it is our privilege and our joy to call *Our Father*.

May the habit of recollection make you men of strong convictions, truly apostolic priests, and saints whose lives will be the Gospel in action !

In a short time hence, when conferring on you the priestly consecration through which you will become my fellow-workers in this diocese, I shall address to God on your behalf this prayer, which you will take as the summary of your rule of life : " O God, the Author of all sanctification . . . pour forth the grace of Thy benediction upon these Thy servants whom we dedicate unto the honour of the priesthood, that, by the gravity of their behaviour and the

<sup>1</sup> *Qui Spiritu Dei aguntur, ii sunt Filii Dei* (Rom. viii. 14).

<sup>2</sup> *Sine intermissione orate* (1 Thess. v. 17).

austerity of their lives, they may prove themselves older than their years . . . that, meditating day and night upon Thy law, they may believe what they read therein, may teach what they believe, and may practise what they preach."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Deus sanctificationum omnium auctor . . . super hos famulos tuos, quos ad Presbyterii honorem dedicamus, munus tuæ benedictionis infunde : ut gravitate actuum, et censura vivendi probent se seniores . . . : ut in lege tua die ac nocte meditantes, quod legerint, credant ; quod crediderint, doceant ; quod docuerint, imitentur* (Pontif. Rom. "De Ordinatione Presbyteri").



DEO GRATIAS











St. Michael's College  
Library

PHONE RENEWALS

026-7114

MERCER, D.F.F.J.  
Conferences to his  
seminarists.

BQT  
2292  
.M4.



